



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07574474 2



NOV

C. K. K. K.

1

2

GOD'S PRISONER

A STORY

BY

JOHN OXENHAM

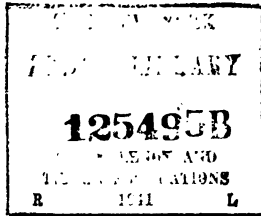
R

"The Lord despiseth not his prisoners,
He brought them out of Darkness
And the Shadow of Death,
And brake their bands in sunder."



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1899



COPYRIGHT, 1897, 1899,

BY

JOHN OXENHAM.



**THE MERSON COMPANY PRESS,
RAHWAY, N. J.**

F

TO
YOU
WHO HAVE HELPED

292

100

100

CONTENTS.

BOOK I.

THE CRIME.	
CHAPTER	PAGE
I. AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR	1
II. HOW JOHN BRODIE MARKED HIS COFFIN LID	5
III. THE IRREVOCABLE STEP	9
IV. SEALED FROM SIGHT	12

BOOK II.

THE PUNISHMENT.	
I. ON THE RACK	17
II. BREATHING SPACE	22
III. THE GRINDING OF THE MILLS	24
IV. GROUND SMALL	31
V. LIFE'S IRONIES	34
VI. BLOW UPON BLOW	37
VII. A GLEAM OF HOPE	44
VIII. IN THE VALLEY OF SHADOWS	48
IX. AN ANGEL OF LIGHT	51
X. BRODIE WANTS HIS BODY	59
XI. AN ANGEL OF ANOTHER COLOR	63
XII. PREPARING FOR FLIGHT	72
XIII. THIS BODY OF DEATH	76

BOOK III.

THE REDEMPTION.	
I. FIRST STEP TOWARD FREEDOM	87
II. FREE	95
III. ON THE WINGS OF THE WIND	102

IV.	THE STORY OF THE "ISOBEL"	109
V.	THE BEE BEGINS TO HUM	116
VI.	THE WORKING OF THE SEQUENCE	123
VII.	HOW CAN THESE THINGS BE?	132
VIII.	THE WRECK ON THE REEF	142
IX.	THE BEE HUMS AGAIN	150
X.	AN UNEXPECTED MEETING	151
XI.	TREACHERY	162
XII.	FACE TO FACE	169
XIII.	THE WAY OF REDEMPTION	177
XIV.	DISCOVERIES	187
XV.	A FIGHT WITH THE DEVIL	196
XVI.	MORE DISCOVERIES	203
XVII.	RANALD HELPS	208
XVIII.	UNEXPECTED VISITORS	214
XIX.	EXPECTED VISITORS	221
XX.	WHY DON'T YOU SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, JOHN?	231
XXI.	THE DEFAULT OF THE MEAT TINS	237
XXII.	$5 - 2 = 3$	245
XXIII.	SEEDS OF HOPE	251
XXIV.	THE BLOOMING OF THE GREAT WHITE FLOWER	256
XXV.	WHOM GOD HATH JOINED	262
XXVI.	$3 + 1 = 4$	265
XXVII.	HOW THEY CAME TO THE ISLE OF SILENCE	273
XXVIII.	AND WHAT THEY FOUND THERE	279
XXIX.	HOW THE "HOLY GHOST" CAME TO THEM	286
XXX.	IN A VERY TIGHT PLACE	297
XXXI.	SALVATION BY TREACHERY	308
XXXII.	GOOD-BY	312

GOD'S PRISONER

BOOK I.

THE CRIME.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

JOHN BRODIE sat at his desk in his private office, and glowered at the ledger in front of him—thunder and lightning incarnate.

His face, ordinarily grave and full of the kindest consideration and courtesy, was furrowed into deep corrugations; his tight-pressed lips were cast-iron in their rigidity, but the throbbing pulse in cheek and temple showed that his teeth were grinding savagely; his hands were clenched as though to strike. The whole usual aspect of the man—the calm, unruffled imperturbability—the powerful reserve and self-control, which had carried him so far and so high among his fellows, had, for the moment, fallen from him, and he fairly shook in a wild storm of anger.

He raised his wrathful eyes for a moment and gazed stormily into nothingness, then whirled over the pages again, compared several entries, and banged his hand down on the push of the electric bell on his desk, and

held it there while the shrill peal thrilled the office with its wild alarm.

A disheveled small boy dashed in, wide-eyed and white at the unusual imperativeness of the summons.

"Send McCaskie!"

The small boy fled, thanking his stars that his name was not McCaskie, and, having done his errand, slid back to his desk and informed the clerks in the outer office that there was a big row on, and that Mr. McCaskie was in for it this time, dead sure.

McCaskie, the cashier, appeared at the door of the private office, a tall, smart, good-looking fellow, trimly groomed and well dressed, better dressed if anything than his master. He had been with the firm for fifteen years, and knew all the ins and outs of the business as well as John Brodie did himself. In the whole of that fifteen years he had never seen John Brodie look as he did just now.

"Shut the door, McCaskie! What is the meaning of this—and this—and this?"

McCaskie's jaw tightened almost imperceptibly as he came round and stood by Brodie's side and glanced down at the items indicated by Brodie's long finger as he turned over the pages. He stooped and carefully examined the entries.

"Those are not my entries, Mr. Brodie;" and the tension of his face relaxed.

"Whose are they?" asked Brodie harshly.

McCaskie only looked at him and was silent.

"Speak, man!" said Brodie, striking the desk with clenched fist. "D—— it, are you gone dumb?"

Never in his whole fifteen years had McCaskie, or any of his staff, heard John Brodie use an oath before.

He was too strong a man to stoop to strong language. McCaskie was still silent, but at last, under Brodie's savagely questioning gaze, he said:

"That ledger is rarely in my possession, as you know, Mr. Brodie. Any entries not mine must be either yours or Mr. Ayrton's."

"By which you mean that, as they are not mine, they are Ayrton's?"

The cashier was silent.

Brodie waved him to a seat, Ayrton's seat, on the other side of the wide desk.

"Now, McCaskie, let us have this out at once. What is the meaning of it? The books have been tampered with!"

"It looks like it."

"By my partner?"

McCaskie raised his eyebrows non-committally.

"Do you know to what extent?"

"I do not, Mr. Brodie. The entries you have pointed out are all of recent date."

"What has he been up to now?"

McCaskie was silent.

"Speak, if you know!" urged Brodie. "I have a right to know all you can tell me, McCaskie."

"It is only hearsay, Mr. Brodie. I have heard that Mr. Ayrton has lost heavily in Argentines lately."

"Ah! Couldn't the fool be content with dropping his money on the turf and at cards without throwing it into the bottomless pit? Send up at once to Mr. Ayrton's chambers and say I must see him here again before I start to-night. I shall be here till nine. The mail leaves at ten. Good God! to think of this thing turning up just at this juncture!"

McCaskie bowed and withdrew, and John Brodie got up and paced the room savagely.

And he had reason.

He was starting that night for China on business involving a five-figure profit and an immense future for the firm, and admitting of not one instant's delay; and here at the very last moment, he had stumbled, quite by accident, on a flaw in the foundation of his business—a flaw which might endanger the safety of the structure he had spent so many toilsome years in raising.

It was atrocious. It was damnable, perfectly damnable, that his partner—the man who should have been his right hand, his other self, and a tower of strength—should prove a broken reed and a traitor.

He paced the room with sharp, quick turns, but presently the pace became slower and slower, and, buried in deep thought, he hardly moved.

The well-tried machinery of his brain was settling down to its regular steady beat, and he was beginning to see his way out. At last he smote his right fist into his left palm with a decisive crack, and said out loud:

“Yes, I will go!”

Then he sat down at his desk, dashed off a couple of letters, addressed the first envelope wrong, and tore it up angrily—that kind of thing was so unusual with him—addressed fresh envelopes, and sealed his letters. Then he rose and again paced the room slowly and full of thought, awaiting the arrival of his partner.

CHAPTER II.

HOW JOHN BRODIE MARKED HIS COFFIN LID.

FIFTEEN years before John Brodie inherited from his father, "Chinese Brodie," as he was universally called, a thriving import and export business with the East. John Brodie the Second labored energetically on the solid foundation laid by the old man, and his business increased so fast that his capital was altogether insufficient for the proper working of the concern.

He looked round for a partner with money, brains, and energy.

James Ayrton was introduced by a common friend. His father had just died leaving him twenty thousand pounds. He was married to a girl from Brodie's own native Greenock, and was well spoken of as straight and energetic.

So the connection came about. Ayrton became a partner in the London house, and Brodie took in as partner in the Shanghai branch an old and trusted assistant who had been his father's right hand all the time he had lived in the East.

For ten years all went well. Then Ayrton's wife died. He had no children. His home life was broken up, and his energies began to dissipate in extraneous matters, and there arose a certain amount of friction between the partners.

Brodie had never been out to China, where his father had spent the best part of his life. But all over the eastern ports the reputation of the house stood

high, and the name of Brodie was a name to conjure with.

He had long contemplated a visit to the East, and now the sudden death of his partner in Shanghai rendered the visit imperative, and necessitated an almost instantaneous departure. For, after long planning and the most careful consideration, the Shanghai house had undertaken a great and somewhat speculative contract, which, rightly engineered, and successfully carried through, meant very large immediate profits and immense possibilities for the future.

Brodie did not hesitate. On receipt of the cablegram announcing his partner's sudden death, he booked a passage by the next P. and O. boat, gave Henry Verrier, his solicitor—a close personal friend, and the only honest lawyer he had ever met, Brodie always said—his power of attorney over all his affairs, and tenderly packed his curios—of which he was an ardent collector, and many of which were almost priceless—into a couple of big tin-lined wooden cases from the office, which he sealed with his own seal, and himself conveyed to the Safe Deposit Vaults in Queen Victoria Street.

Then he put his house into an agent's hands to let furnished for a year, and within a week from the day the cablegram arrived he was ready to start.

And then—within a few hours of his departure—he stumbled, quite by accident, on this wretched default in his partner, and it angered him beyond all words.

He had been only too keenly cognizant for months past of Ayrton's loss of interest in business matters, and general laxity. But he had got so used to trusting him fully and implicitly that he had never dreamt

of imputing to him more than a perhaps not unnatural upsetting, resulting from the sudden break-up of his home life.

Brodie never discussed the matter with him.

As his wont was, he showed his displeasure by a cold reserve in their business intercourse, and left Ayrton to appreciate the reason and to mend his ways.

The clock on the mantel chimed six, and the sudden turmoil in the outer office, and the clanging of safe doors, showed that the staff was preparing to leave. The clearance was slower than usual, however, and presently a tap at the door evoked a sonorous "Come" from Brodie, and McCaskie entered with a somewhat doubtful glance at his chief's face.

"They are all waiting to say 'Good-by' to you, sir. Will you see them?"

Brodie's lips gave a twitch, but he controlled his face, and walked out into the office.

"Good-by, boys!" he said. "Do your duty by the firm while I am away. Good-by! Good-by!"

He shook hands with each one, down to the office boy, and every one of the warehousemen, and wishing him a good voyage and speedy return, they trooped away.

Old Jenks, the foreman packer, very red in the face, and more than usually watery about the eyes, was the last, and Brodie, as he shook the horny hand that had nailed up "J. B." cases for nearly forty years, said—perpetrating the joke of the office on the old man:

"Good-by, Jenks. What is your figure now?"

And the old man said hoarsely:

"22,221, Mr. Brodie, sir. Them two cases o' yours

just bringed it up to 22,221. I wish you could ha' made it the even figure. It would ha' looked more lucky like."

Brodie laughed in spite of himself, and then said:

"You leave me out a good strong case with a tin lining in, Jenks, and I'll see if there isn't something else I want to put in it. I've some books which might be best sealed up. Mark the lid 22,222. No, don't wait for me. Just leave it ready. I shall run up to the house for some things. Now, good-by!"

And the satisfied Jenks disappeared into the depths to execute the master's last orders.

"Shall I wait, Mr. Brodie? Can I be of any further service?" asked McCaskie.

"Is the boy back from Mr. Ayrton's yet?"

"Not yet, sir. It's quite time he was," instinctively looking at his watch.

Brodie pondered for a moment. "Just run round to Verrier's and ask Mr. Henry Verrier if he could step over here for a minute, McCaskie."

McCaskie was back in five minutes. Mr. Henry Verrier had been summoned suddenly to Glasgow, and would not be back for three days.

Just then the boy who had been up to Ayrton's chambers in Piccadilly came panting in. Mr. Ayrton was out and would not be in till half-past seven, but they would give him the letter as soon as he came in.

Brodie's face darkened again.

"I don't think you need wait, McCaskie. There is no knowing when he will get here. I have to run up to the house for my portmanteau and some odds and ends. I shall be back here before Ayrton comes. I shall just have time to ventilate this matter with him

before leaving. Henry Verrier has my power of attorney, as you know. Morris & Keen will overhaul the books at once. I have written to both of them. Among you, you must keep things ship-shape till I return."

"It is most unfortunate your having to go just when this matter turns up."

"Unfortunatel it is simply damnable! But there is more to lose by not going than by going, as you know. I am on thorns at thought of what may be going on in Shanghai. If this matter turns out as it should do, that will practically become the center of our operations for some time to come. Perhaps I may decide to stop there altogether, there's no knowing. Well, good-by, McCaskie! Do your best for the firm."

"I will, Mr. Brodie. Good-by, sir, and *bon voyage*."

"Leave the side door on the Yale; I will come in that way, and, by the way, post these for me as you go. Good-by again!"

And Brodie heard his footsteps down the stairs and through the warehouse. Then he heard the side door slam, and he was alone.

CHAPTER III.

THE IRREVOCABLE STEP.

BRODIE came out a few minutes later, sprang into a cab, and was driven off to his home. He was back within the hour, and the cabman carried his portmanteau and half a dozen parcels of books, hurriedly tied up in bundles, to the side door, and Brodie himself

passed them inside. As cabs are not always obtainable just when wanted in that quarter of the city, at that time of night, he bade the man wait.

It was eight o'clock, but Ayrton had not yet put in an appearance, and, pacing the private office, Brodie impatiently awaited his coming.

The partners had separated at midday, Ayrton leaving on plea of a pressing engagement, and they had not thought to meet again for a year or more. Brodie had a shrewd idea of the nature of the pressing engagement, but had raised no objections. They had been in close confabulation, discussing plans and ideas for four days, and had settled all arrangements for the carrying on of the business in Brodie's absence. And then—actually as the result of Ayrton's absence, which left three or four unoccupied hours on his hands—Brodie had begun casually turning over the leaves of the private ledger, and his eyes were opened.

The clock chimed half-past eight. His time was getting short—ridiculously short for the work in hand. The storm gathered in his face again, and his teeth ground slowly and savagely.

At last! Brodie heard the slam of the outer door, then the quick, familiar step on the stair, and his partner entered, a tall, well-made fellow in evening dress and a light overcoat.

"Hello, old man!" he began, with an assumption of jocularly, "thought our fond adieux were completed. Only just got your note or would have been here sooner. Some last words?"

Brodie stood and looked at him, black disgust and indignation showing in his eyes and the corners of his mouth, in spite of all his self-control. He noted the

deepened color of the other's face. The sullen droop of the eyelids, the slight hardening of his tones—signs he knew only too well.

Now that he had got the man here he could barely trust himself to speak. He felt perfectly volcanic. Had the words come out as they surged in his brain, if Ayrton had any grain of self-respect left, they would have blasted him where he stood.

The silence grew ominous.

"D— it! what's wrong?" asked Ayrton.

"Sit down!" said Brodie, through his teeth, and Ayrton dropped into his accustomed seat.

Brodie swung open the safe door, drew out the ledger, whirled it open on the desk in front of the other, and said in a voice that cut like a knife:

"You ask what's wrong. What is this—and this—and this?" His voice had lapsed into a hiss. "You despicable scoundrel! What's wrong? You're wrong, James Ayrton, and, by God! you shall suffer for it! Haven't you drawn enough in the last twelve months to almost shake the credit of the firm, without descending to forgery and falsification in order to steal more? Fool—idiot—swindler!"

The volcano boiled over. The words poured out like a fury of hot lava. He lost all control over himself and did not know what he was saying.

"To jail you shall go as sure as my name is Brodie. You thought to be rid of me—to go on thieving at your leisure. But here I stop till I see you laid by the heels. You mean, pitiful, swindling——"

Words failed him—he fairly choked with the violence of his unaccustomed rage. He advanced a step with clenched fists as though to seize his partner.

And then the end came, swift and terrible. A sharp crack, a curl of blue smoke, and Brodie sank down in a huddled heap on the floor.

Ayrton had sat bending forward, gazing at the ledger and pulling viciously at his mustache. He was in a dour and excited frame of mind himself. He had been at a race-meeting that afternoon, had lost heavily, and had drunk enough to make him savage. His gloomy eyes saw past the figures in the ledger—past the menacing figure in front of him—saw ruin and disgrace—saw that the end had come, and his hand slid into his private drawer, and groped for the revolver that always lay there.

He had often contemplated suicide as the only way out of the network of troubles he had landed himself in. But when Brodie advanced, with an unpremeditated instinct of self-defense Ayrton turned the weapon on him, and the bullet intended for himself found its way to Brodie's heart.

Ayrton sprang toward him and bent over him horror-stricken. The other never stirred. Ayrton shrinkingly placed his hand against his heart. Then he stumbled back to his chair and crouched, head in hands, gazing stonily into vacancy.

CHAPTER IV.

SEALED FROM SIGHT.

A LOUD knocking at the door downstairs startled him to his feet. He waited, his heart going like a ship's pump.

Perhaps it was only the postman mechanically

knocking as he dropped the letters into the box. If so there would be no second knock.

If it was somebody who knew that either he or Brodie was there—then——

The knock came again, loud and impatient. He turned out the light in the office, put on his hat, and went downstairs, and with shaking fingers opened the door.

“Now then, guv’nor,” said a hoarse voice, “have yer forgot I’m a-waitin’ here for over an hour?”

“I never told you to wait.”

“Ho! Never told me to wait, didn’t yer? Yes, but you did, mister! Says you——”

“Ah! I see you are not the man who drove me here. It would be——”

“Beg pardon, sir! I sees it wasn’t you. It was the gent with the lot o’ books and the big portmanty.”

“I see. Just wait a minute and I’ll see if he wants you to wait still. I doubt if he’ll be ready for an hour yet.”

“Oh, don’t you ’urry ’im, mister. I can wait all night, so long as it’s understood I am a-waitin’.”

Ayrton closed the door, and presently re-opened it, and told the man he was not to wait any longer. He gave him five shillings, and the man drove away with a “Right you are, guv’nor.”

Then he fastened the door and fell to pacing the warehouse in the dark. The thought of the office upstairs, and what it contained, was too much for him.

He bumped up against an empty case which lay out in the middle of the floor, and then stumbled over the lid which stood up against it, and brought it down with a clatter that shook his nerves.

He struck a match and lighted a gas jet so as to avoid further bruises.

It was a big new case, with the tin lining placed inside it, all ready to be packed. On the inside of the loose lid which lay upside down on the floor, were stenciled the words: "WITH J. JENKS'S BEST WISHES." He picked up the lid. On the outside was the firm's regular shipping mark, "J. B." in a diamond, and the figures 22,222.

Ayrton stood looking at them. Brodie had probably intended packing the books he had brought down, into the case, and sending it to his room in the Safe Deposit Vaults after his other cases. The case put an idea into his head, and he turned and paced to and fro thinking it out.

Yes, it would do. It would give him a short respite—time to consider his next move—perhaps time to get away, if he could realize sufficient funds to get away with. He threw off his coat, turned up his cuffs, and set to work. First he carried in from the side door all Brodie's books, and placed a layer of them in the case. Then he went slowly up to the office. He hated to touch or even to look at the huddled heap on the floor. But it had to be done. He stooped and turned it over, and from the watch chain he detached Brodie's gold seal. It was horrible. It felt like robbing the dead, but he had to have it. Then, with averted head and pricking flesh, he dragged the body downstairs and doubled it into the packing case. Then up to the sample room, whence he returned carrying several boxes of pungent aromatic Eastern scents, which he emptied wholesale into the case. Then he spread another layer of books so that the hor-

rible fantastic thing inside was completely hidden, and with a sigh of relief he laid the tin lid in its place, and with a wooden mallet bent over on to it the overlapping edges of the tin lining.

He was dripping with perspiration, but his work was not yet completed.

He sought out the necessary tools—the solder, the resin, the blowpipe and spirit lamp, and set to work awkwardly enough to solder up the inner case.

He burnt his hands, he squandered resin and solder till the lid looked like a grotesque bas-relief. But at last it was done. Then he nailed down the wooden lid with the longest nails and the heaviest hammer he could find.

He was tired to death, and hands and knees alike were trembling with the unusual exertion and with the rattling of his nerves. One of the last blows missed the nail and fell on his own thumb, splitting it to the bone.

But he still had to seal the case. A stout twisted wire was already fitted into a groove running round the bottom and sides. He fitted the ends of the wire into the groove in the lid, cleated them into the round hole where they met, poured in the sealing wax, and impressed it with Brodie's own seal.

Then he took the taper, and mounted the stairs slowly, examining every inch of every step, right back into the private office. But there were no incriminating traces. The bullet was a small one, but it had gone very straight and done its work. If any blood flowed, it had been sopped up in the dead man's clothes.

Then he opened an old unused safe that was built

into the wall, carried up the portmanteau and the remaining books, flung them in, threw in Brodie's hat and traveling coat, and broke and bent his umbrella, and flung it in too, and locked the safe. He put the ledger into its usual place in the big safe, and dropped into his chair utterly exhausted.

And so it was over. He was a murderer. He had never thought to sink to that. He had done many things which would not bear thinking of, but he had always had a lurking hope of being able by some fortunate chance to make good his defaults. But this—this was the irreparable crime. He had crossed the line which never could be recrossed. Well, anyhow for a time he was safe—for a few days—until it cropped up somehow or other that Brodie never sailed on the *Poonah*, and inquiry arose as to where he was and what had become of him.

He glanced round the room before turning out the light, and a torn envelope under the table caught his eye. He picked it up carelessly, and then held it with shaking hand. It bore the name, in Brodie's bold, flowing writing, of Henry Verrier, the lawyer, but the actual address was that of Morris & Keen, the accountants. Ayrton noted the error in the address and understood it.

Brodie had written to both Verrier, his lawyer, and to Morris & Keen, the accountants. His delinquencies were probably known to them, or would be as soon as they received the letters, and this last desperate deed was probably futile.

He shivered and crept downstairs.

Book II.

THE PUNISHMENT.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE RACK.

AYRTON put in an appearance at the office earlier than usual next morning. He was there before any of the clerks, to their great confusion. The first thing he did, after carefully fastening the door of the private office, was to open the old safe and fling in Brodie's gold seal with which he had sealed the case the previous night. He had found it among his things when he emptied his pockets, and he wanted to be rid of it.

He had passed a night of sleepless horror—his mind a chaos of doubts and terrors. On the very doorstep of the warehouse he hesitated, and hung in doubt as to whether he should enter or should turn and flee to the uttermost end of the earth. But cold common sense told him that his only chance of even temporary safety lay in facing the situation. For one thing, he lacked money enough to get away with, in the way he would wish to go.

The chances were that whatever Brodie had written to Morris & Keen, the accountants, they would not

make any great headway in the books for a day or two, and that time might at all events suffice for him to collect some capital toward a fresh start elsewhere. Then there was the case to be disposed of. His very first business must be to bury it in the Safe Deposit Vaults. He hung in the wind on the doorstep, then took a long breath, as one does before a cold plunge, clenched his jaw tight, and stepped inside.

Every nerve of him was on the alert for accusatory signs or sounds.

But everything looked as usual. The piled-up cases did not shriek out the sights they had seen the night before, the stairs showed no traces of the horrible burden that had been dragged down them so limply and heavily. His nerves got their first jar, however, before he got upstairs to his office.

In the center of the packing room lay the Case No. 22,222, and Jenks the foreman stood looking at it.

"Mornin', Mr. Ayrton, sir!" he said, as soon as he saw Ayrton, "them's the gov'nor's books, I s'pose. Did he pack 'em himself?"

"I suppose he did, Jenks."

"Humph! I 'spects he's forgotten to solder the tin lid of the inside case, and if he thought of it, I don't s'pose he knowed how to do it proper. I've half a mind just to spring that lid and see as it's all right."

"No, don't touch it, Jenks. Leave it just as Mr. Brodie left it. I'm going to take it to the Safe Deposit as soon as I've gone through the letters. Mr. Brodie would see to it all right."

"Right you are, sir, if you says so. Did he—did Mr. Brodie say anything about the case, sir?"

"Yes, he got your message, Jenks, and told me to

thank you and to give you this;" and he gave the old fellow a half sovereign.

"Ah, much obliged to him, sir, and much obliged to you, sir. He always were a good sort, were Mr. Brodie. How long do you reckon he'll be away, Mr. Ayrton?"

"A year, maybe;" and Ayrton passed on up the stairs to the office.

The letters lay on Brodie's desk as usual. He sat down in Brodie's chair and proceeded to open them.

Among the first that came to his hand was one from McCaskie. It was addressed to the firm, and simply stated that through a slight accident to his foot the night before, he was ordered by the doctor to lay up for a day or two.

This was a distinct relief. In his present state of nervous tension and depression, McCaskie would have been a worry and an annoyance to him.

He rapidly disposed of the day's work—dictating letters, issuing the necessary orders right and left, and driving matters with a strong hand, to the astonishment of the staff, who had looked forward to easy times while Mr. Brodie was away.

But Ayrton wanted to get away lest Verrier or Morris & Keen should drop in, and every time a visitor was announced his heart plunged and leaped in a way that caused him actual physical pain.

The morning's work disposed of, Ayrton took his hat and went downstairs to see after Case No. 22,222. He had it put on to a cab, and drove off with it to the Safe Deposit Vaults in Queen Victoria Street. But on the road he remembered that Brodie would have his own key of his strong room in his pocket, and that

the Safe Deposit people would have only the counter key necessary to complete the operation of opening the door. Their key alone would not open it.

He put his head out of the window and told the man to drive to the Safe Deposit Company in Chancery Lane. There he took a small strong room in the name of John Brodie, deposited the case, and drove away home to his chambers, as fagged and weary with the nervous strain as if he had been through a prize-fight, and been badly beaten.

He got no sleep that night either. For though the first keen edge of his horror had worn off with the safety of the day, his wounded thumb twinged and throbbed as though every possible sensitiveness to pain in his whole body had combined with his conscience to keep alive the memory of his crime.

Racked with pain, and tortured by his thoughts, he tried to drown both with heavy drinking. But while this to some extent deadened his recollections of the previous night's work, it only increased the pain of the wound, and the morning found him hollow-eyed and haggard, and utterly worn out.

However, he had to brace up again, and go down to the office to get through the day as best he might, and he determined to see a doctor, have his thumb attended to, and obtain from him such drugs as would insure him sufficient sleep to keep his brain from getting unhinged.

As he passed through the warehouse to go to his office his eye fell on the lid of a packing case stuck up in a prominent position, as though purposely placed to attract attention. The lid was marked "J. B." in a diamond, No. 22,222.

Ayrton stopped short and caught a sharp breath, and then passed on to his office with an effort. That was the lid he had nailed down over Brodie's body. How did it get there?

Controlling himself by an effort, he disposed of the morning's mail. Then he lit a cigar and strolled out into the packing room. He must see the back of that lid. If it bore Jenks's farewell message to Brodie, there could be no doubt about it. If it was the identical lid, how in the devil's name had it got there? Had Jenks, against his instructions, opened the case while his back was turned? If so, Jenks should go out head first, and his place would know him no more. Even if he had, however, it was unlikely he would have opened the tin lining when he saw that it had been securely made up.

Jenks was not in sight. The other men were piling up some goods at the far end of the room. Ayrton strolled casually up to the lid and turned it slightly with the hand. On the back was the legend in big black stenciled letters, "WITH J. JENKS'S BEST WISHES"—just as he had seen them that other night.

His heart stood still, and he bit into the cigar savagely. Then he pulled himself together again.

"What's this?" he asked one of the men who was passing, indicating the lid.

"I d'n know, sir. I see Jenks with it last night. The men say it's——" and he hesitated.

"Say it's what?"

"They call it Mr. Brodie's tombstone, sir!"

"Where's Jenks?" asked Ayrton sharply.

"He's went out, sir. I d'n know where he's——"

Here Jenks appeared, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand, and, informed of the matter in question, he hastened to explain.

"That were the lid, sir, o' Mr. Brodie's box o' books." Ayrton's heart stood still. "I got it all ready and then found the wire grooves didn't fit right, so I marked up another one. I put it up there just to mind me o' Mr. Brodie. A kind o' momento, as you might say. Them fools o' men calls it his tombstone."

"All right, Jenks. We don't need any tombstones. Clear off the marks and fit it to its proper case, then we shall have no mistakes made."

"Right you are, sir!"

And Ayrton went back to his office breathing freely.

CHAPTER II.

BREATHING SPACE.

THE second mail had just come in, and among the letters was one from McCaskie. It bore the Paris post-mark, to Ayrton's great surprise, and it ran thus:

"JAS. AYRTON, Esq.,

"MESSRS. BRODIE & Co.

"DEAR SIR: By my doctor's advice I am going to take up my residence in Spain, and shall arrive there to-morrow night. The necessities of the case will compel me to make a lengthened stay. I therefore tender my resignation of the post I have hitherto held

in your office. The reasons which compel my residence there prevent my giving you any address.

“Wishing the firm all prosperity,

“I remain, dear sir,

“Yours in haste,

“RONALD McCASKIE.”

Ayrton read this epistle twice before the true meaning of it dawned upon him. Then light broke in on him. He smote his knee and ejaculated, “Saved! by Gad!” and jumped up and paced the room with a new spring in his step.

Yes, this letter of McCaskie’s saved him at all events from any consequences which might arise from the overhauling of the books, for all defaults could now be put down to the absconded cashier.

“I had no idea he’d been at it too,” said Ayrton to himself.

This matter gave such a fillip to his spirits that he ventured on a stroll down the Lane. He had gone but a few steps, however, when he was met by a very old friend of the firm, one John Bloxham, and Bloxham greeted him with:

“Hello, Ayrton, old man, what’s wrong with you? You’re not looking up to the mark.”

Ayrton regretted his temerity in emerging from the office, but made shift to answer:

“No, I’m seedy. Smashed my thumb in a carriage door. Can’t get any sleep.”

“Ah, you should try morphine. It knocks me off like a shot.”

“Well, I’ll see a doctor to-day about the thumb, and get him to fix the other matter at the same time.”

"What did you do with Brodie the other night?"

Ayrton got a grip of himself in the most literal sense. For with the hand that was in his trouser pocket he pinched his leg so fiercely that the mark remained for a month.

"What do you mean?"

"I thought he was going by that ten o'clock train for Paris to catch the boat at Brindisi?"

"Yes."

"But he didn't go, did he?"

"As far as I know he went all right. What made you think he didn't go?"

"Well, I was at the station seeing a friend off who's going out by the same boat. I wanted to introduce them. But Brodie never turned up."

"That's strange," said Ayrton. "Brodie doesn't often miss a train when he sets out to catch it."

"He must have gone some other route," said Bloxham, "or you would have had him back at the office. Anyhow, we shall hear from Brindisi or Suez whether he caught the boat or not."

"Surely," said Ayrton, and passed on disturbed.

CHAPTER III.

THE GRINDING OF THE MILLS.

THE days passed, and the nights—those awful nights! The days were torture—the nights were hell. Ayrton's thumb had been more seriously hurt than he at first imagined. It showed symptoms of blood-poisoning and gathering. Sharp lancing pains

shot from it all up his arm. It twinged and throbbled beyond endurance. Every drop of blood in his body seemed to pass through that thumb, and every pulse-beat was like the stabbing of a thousand white-hot needles.

In the day, busy with other things, he felt it less, but through the lonely hours of the night it kept him on the rack.

He tried by every means in his power to get away from himself and the horror of his thoughts. His club sickened him with its shallow tittle-tattle and polished respectability. His crime had placed him on a different plane from his fellows. He had lost touch with his kind, and he did not need their avoidance of him to recognize the fact.

One night as he sat in a corner of the smoking room of his club, chewing gloomily at his cigar, and trying to drink his thoughts away, the pain of his wound grew suddenly so intense that he bit his lips till they bled, in the effort to keep down the groan that would have given him relief. He flung away his cigar. It blistered his lips. The agony in his arm made his eyes swim. He groped for a champagne cork which some reveler had been toying with in the dining room and had brought into the smoking room. He put the cork into his mouth, and bit with so fierce a grip that his teeth worked through it and met. He bit the pieces till his mouth was full of the dry fragments. He chewed them like a pulping machine till they got into his throat and set him coughing, to the amusement of a party of gilded youths who had been eying his proceedings with vacant amusement. One of them laughed vacuously, and Ayrton saw that they

were watching him. He spat out the cork, glared at them out of eyes that made one or two of them shiver, then rose and staggered away.

"Gad!" said one of the brainless ones, "what's wrong with him?"

"Hurt his thumb!" replied another sententiously.

"Goin' mad, I should say," said a third.

"Guess she's gone back on him," surmised a fourth.

Ayrton went no more to the club.

He dragged his burdened soul and his agonized body through a weary round of dissipation—theaters, music-halls, and worse. He tried everything, but nowhere found relief. Like the singer of old he found no outlet of escape. Wounded body and wounded soul, acting and reacting on one another, seemed like to drive him out of his mind.

Sleep he could not get at any cost. All through the day those cursed letters "J. B. 22,222" danced before his eyes, just as he had seen them on Brodie's coffin lid when he nailed it down and smashed his thumb. And in the dearest hours of the night, in the loneliness of his chamber, when he tried to shut them out by closing his eyes, they gleamed and danced in yellow fire before him, and burnt into his brain a Belshazzar-like message of doom and destruction.

He tried drug after drug, and at times succeeded in rendering himself insensible for a time. But each awakening brought back his horrors in fuller force.

Once or twice he came perilously near passing the irrevocable boundary, but each time he struggled slowly back to life, and wearily took up the burden of it again.

Why did he not cut the thread and escape?

God knows! Perhaps because he felt that escape was impossible—that if he got out of this life the next would offer him no better, even if it could condemn him to no worse.

Perhaps because life, even at its worst, still has possibilities, and because the bull-dog in him refused to acknowledge itself beaten while life lasted. Perhaps because the game is not left entirely to the players, though their cognizance of the Higher Hand in it is small and purblind.

Down town at the office, his restless activity was winning him golden opinions from the business connections of the firm, who had expected to see him carry on even more loosely in Brodie's absence than he had done before.

But they found him constant at his work, keen, alert, and concentrated. They watched him grow hollow-eyed and haggard; and, putting it down to his great labors and responsibilities, they advised him not to overdo it, but to get away for a change.

The time passed, and Morris & Keen had made no sign. The suspense was too great to be borne.

After much pondering Ayrton determined to see them, and from observation find out how the land lay.

Yet he hesitated. Why stir the matter up? And so he waited and waited, but at last nerved himself for the visit.

Morris was away. He saw Keen, and his welcome was calculated to disarm any idea of suspicion on their part.

"Well, Mr. Ayrton, what news have you of Mr. Brodie?"

"None yet," said Ayrton, eyeing closely every ex-

pression of the other's face. "It's almost too soon yet."

"And what can we do for you, Mr. Ayrton?"

Ayrton tossed him McCaskie's letters. Keen read them through and whistled.

"McCaskie!" he said, "the last man I would have suspected. You want an investigation made at once, I suppose? Any idea how much he's had you for?"

"Not the slightest. You had better look into matters; quietly, you know. No need to spread it around. Better get to it as soon as you can."

Morris & Keen evidently knew nothing, and his mind was at rest on that point.

But the first person he met in the street on his way back to the office was the jovial Bloxham, who hailed him with:

"Hello, Ayrton! So Brodie caught the boat, after all. I just got a letter from Easdaile—Why, what the deuce——"

Ayrton had waved his hand and sped down the street, apparently in pursuit of some distant friend. His legs carried him automatically. He thanked God that his legs carried him, though little right had he to thank God for anything. His blood had become water, and his heart a stone. Yea, his heart had seemed to stop beating at Bloxham's words, and then began pounding away so furiously that his brain was like to burst, and everything swam round him. If he had not run, and if his legs had not worked in spite of him, he would have fallen.

If Bloxham had followed, he might well have thought him crazy.

He plunged blindly through the stream of 'buses

and cabs in King William Street, and dived down the first narrow lane he came to. He took no heed of the people he ran against, nor of where he was going. He found himself at last on Old Swan Pier. A boat was just ranging up alongside. He mechanically walked aboard, and sat down.

What was it Bloxham had said?

“Brodie caught the boat, after all!”

“Brodie—caught—the—boat—after—all!”

What did it mean? Brodie was nailed up in Case No. 22,222 in the Safe Deposit Vaults, and Bloxham said he had caught the boat after all.

Was it a wretched joke of Bloxham's? What a devil the man must be to joke on a subject like—but, good God! Bloxham did not know anything about Case No. 22,222. What did it mean? In the devil's name, what did it mean?

The boat skimmed along and the paddles beat a devil's tattoo to the words that rang in Ayrton's whirling brain.

“Brodie caught the boat! Brodie caught the boat! Two—two—two—two—two! Two—two—two—two—two!”

A man came round after tickets, and Ayrton handed him money and took no note of the change, whereby the man defrauded him of twopence and concluded he was drunk.

The breeze refreshed him—the city was behind—mud and piles and coal-hoppers gradually fell astern—green banks rose on either side.

People came and went, and presently the boat stopped at Kew. The man who had made capital out of him told him they went no further, and hinted that

there was a very good public on the other side of the bridge.

Ayrton walked ashore, and rambled into the gardens, and presently finding a solitary place, near a sunken pond, in the wilder part, he flung himself down on the breast of Mother Earth, and lay bruised, and sore, and sick to death.

He buried his forehead in the cool of the grass. He beat the turf with his unwounded hand, and clawed his fingers deep into the roots of it, and the smell of the earth and the bruised grass was soothing to him, and for the moment thirty years dropped out of his life, and he was a child again, grubbing up daisies in the meadow behind the old home.

“ Brodie caught the boat! Brodie caught the boat! Two—two—two—two—two! Case No. 22,222!”

He lay there till his clothes were damp with dew and his limbs cramped and stiff.

The gates had long since been closed, and the gate-keeper greeted his appearance with strong language, and advised him to go home and get to bed, and not to forget to take his boots off. But when he looked into the haggard face of the man, and saw that he paid no more attention than if he had been made of wood, he recognized that this was a case beyond his ordinary ken, and suffered him to pass out in silence.

CHAPTER IV.

GROUND SMALL.

AYRTON rambled on along the river-bank and found himself at Richmond. He went on with stolid automatic stride till he came to Twickenham. Here he turned into a waterside inn, and ate and drank, and then doggedly took the path again, and tramped back the way he had come—crossed the bridge at Kew and got into the highroad, and walked every foot of the way back into town.

He reached his chambers between two and three in the morning, footsore and weary.

But during the pilgrimage he made up his mind on two points as to the future, that is if any future were permitted to him.

He would devote all his energies during the next few months to the amassing of such a sum as would enable him to make a fresh start in some uttermost part of the earth—from choice some semi-civilized island in the Pacific—but anywhere, so long as it was out of the world.

He reckoned it would be at least five or six months before Brodie's disappearance could be definitely known, and suspicion aroused. In the meantime he would have to use all his wits to hoodwink inquiring friends, and he planned out several ways of doing this. And—he would avoid Bloxham.

That night, for the first time, he got a couple of hours' consecutive sleep,—fitful and broken, but undrugged and natural,—and the morning found him

stiff and sore in body, but better balanced in mind than he had been since that terrible night.

It was one thing, however, to determine to avoid Bloxham, and quite another thing to be able to do so.

He had hardly disposed of his morning's mail, and was still busy dictating to his shorthand clerk, when the boy came in and announced, "Mr. Bloxham."

"Did you tell him I was in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, ask him to sit down for one moment."

Then he finished the letter he was at, dismissed the clerk, pulled his chair round, so that his back was toward the window, reached down a box of cigars, got one well alight, and rang the bell for Mr. Bloxham to be shown in.

The jovial Bloxham rolled in, in his usual hearty style, hat on back of head, cigar in mouth.

Ayrton bit into his cigar with the fierce grip of a man bracing up for an operation.

"Good-morning, Bloxham!" he said, through teeth and cigar. "I must apologize for quitting you so abruptly yesterday. I caught sight of a man I hadn't seen for five years, and if I'd missed him then——"

"Don't apologize, dear boy! don't apologize!"

"Let me see. What was it you were beginning to tell me? Something new in the way of a joke, wasn't it?"

"Not at all, dear boy, not at all! I was just saying I was glad old Brodie caught the boat after all."

Ayrton blew out a big veil of smoke.

"Of course he caught it. I told you he would, didn't I?"

"You did, dear boy, you did! But how the deuce he managed it beats me. Easdaile sends me a line from Port Said, just to thank me for the card I gave him to Brodie, you know,—says he introduced himself, and Brodie was inclined to stand off and be stiff at first,—seemed even a bit annoyed. Can't you just see the old boy at it? But now they're the best of friends. But maybe Brodie wrote you himself?"

"Er—no—not yet. I've not had a line from him. He's—enjoying the rest, I expect, and will think it time enough to write when he has to buckle down to business."

"Aye, aye! quite likely. He was needing a change. I thought he looked very badly the last time I saw him. Did you notice it yourself?"

"Yes," said Ayrton grimly, rolling his cigar to the other side of his mouth, between his teeth. "I noticed it, and he felt it, too. Well, he'll have a good long rest now."

"Aye, aye! a long rest and change of scene ought to make a new man of him. Anything new in business?"

"No. Nothing! Things a bit dull."

"Same with us. Well, I'll move on. Ta, ta! Awfully glad old Brodie caught that boat."

"So long!" said Ayrton.

As the door closed behind him, Ayrton's eye caught the reflection of his own face in the small mirror on the wall opposite—caught it just as the mask fell from it. He spat the cigar, chewed to bitter pulp, into the waste-paper basket, softly pulled down the catch of the Yale lock, so that no one could break in on him, and then sat down in his chair, his hands gripping the

arms of it, and his head sunk forward on his breast, his woeful eyes staring into vacancy.

What did it all mean? Bloxham was evidently in sober earnest.

"Brodie caught the boat. Brodie caught the boat. Case 22,222. Case 22,222."

What in the name of heaven—ah, no! he was outside the pale—what in the name of the devil did it mean?

Was he going crazy? Had he shot John Brodie, and nailed up his body in Case No. 22,222? Or was it all some horrible fantastic trick of his imagination?

He got up and picked out on his bunch the key of the old safe in the wall and opened it. Yes, Brodie's hat and portmanteau and the twisted umbrella lay there. They were real enough, and John Brodie's body lay in the Safe Deposit Vaults, and Bloxham said he had caught the boat. He locked the safe carefully and groped back to his chair, his brain spinning confusedly.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE'S IRONIES.

THE days wore on. Morris & Keen were deep in the books, and all defaults were duly ascribed to the absent McCaskie.

Ayrton's worried and anxious look did not escape notice, in spite of his studied efforts at nonchalance, and they were quietly and considerately ascribed to "matters connected with McCaskie's disappearance which didn't had got bruited about."

He stuck to his business still, in a way that won surprised encomiums from all his acquaintance. But he saw no immediate prospect of realizing his project and getting away with anything like the sum he considered necessary.

The accountants were enjoying themselves exceedingly among the books, and seemed in no hurry to get through with the business. They had pointed out to him that most of the defalcations had been foisted on to his own account, and he had quietly answered that that explained some remarks of Brodie's before he left, which had much puzzled him.

Then again money was not plentiful just now. The funds of the firm were very largely involved in the great speculation in China—in fact, for the time being China had become the center of operations, and London had to take second place.

And Ayrton writhed and groaned in the spirit to think that the great *coup* in China would fail, and all that money be lost, for want of the guiding hand which lay securely sealed up in Case No. 22,222 in the Safe Deposit Vaults in Chancery Lane.

Constant inquiries were made after Brodie. Ayrton could not walk down the street, or turn into the restaurant for lunch, without some friend of the firm tackling him on the subject; and though he steeled himself to answer with a certain amount of equanimity, the horrible incongruity or the ghastly aptness of some of the remarks made it difficult for him at times to refrain from bursting into wild and inextinguishable laughter.

The idea took possession of him that, if he once permitted himself to do this, his brain would give way.

It would be the wild laughter of madness, and the narrow dividing line would never be recrossed by him.

And so he held himself in a grip of iron, and bore himself somberly, and grew more and more careworn in spite of himself.

"Well, Ayrton, what's the news from Brodie?" was the usual greeting.

"Nothing new," Ayrton would answer.

"Must be getting into a warm climate by this time."

"Yes, he's due at Singapore on the 28th."

"Having a good time, I suppose, and taking it easy."

"I suppose so. He doesn't trouble me with much correspondence."

"Lucky fellow. I wish I was in his shoes."

And Ayrton grimly wished so too, so that his chattering might be stopped.

"Brodie shown any signs of life yet, Ayrton?" another would ask.

And Ayrton would answer quietly:

"I've no fresh news from him, if that's what you mean."

And another.

"When do you expect Brodie to reach the promised land, old man?"

"Oh, not for some time yet. He's due at Shanghai on the 10th of next month!"

"H'm! So another couple of weeks will see him comfortably settled in his Celestial home?"

"Hope so," Ayrton would grimly reply.

CHAPTER VI.

BLOW UPON BLOW.

LEST the office staff should think it strange that he never wrote to his partner, he carried on a full and careful correspondence with him, detailing all matters of moment in connection with the business.

He had the letters copied in the letter-book, and addressed to the house in China, but retained them, nominally for the purpose of inserting private letters of his own, and then burned instead of posting them.

He pondered the idea of writing letters to himself as from Brodie, from the various ports at which he touched, and bought thin foreign notepaper for the purpose, his intention being to leave these letters lying about on his desk, knowing well that the staff generally would very soon be cognizant of their contents.

But events happened which put him off the idea. He found in fact that his imagination could not keep pace with actualities.

His *bête-noire* Bloxham rolled in one day.

"Well, Ayrton, heard the news?"

"No. Who's dead now?"

"No one's dead. Quite the other way!"

"Oh! What is it?"

"About Brodie."

Ayrton offered Bloxham a cigar, and lit one himself.

"He's taking matters mighty easy, so far as correspondence goes."

"Ah, he's too busy otherwise," said Bloxham, enjoying himself greatly.

"How's that?"

"Listen here. I got this from Easdaile this morning from Bombay. M-m-m-m—oh, here it is. 'Your friend Brodie and I have got very intimate. Indeed I am inclined to think we may become more than intimate before long. Brodie, in spite of his reticent stand-off ways, has made a great impression on Belle'—Belle's his sister, and a most charming girl,"—and Bloxham sighed—"and the feeling seems to be more than reciprocated. It may, of course, be only an aggravated form of shipboard flirtation, but it seems to me to go much deeper, and neither Belle nor Brodie are absolutely frivolous beings, nor are they in the callowness of their first youth. They seem, indeed, to have made up their minds, and I expect in my next letter to have to inform you that they are engaged. You can be picturing me in your imagination doing the heavy father, and giving the young couple, who are both some years older than myself, my paternal benediction.'"

Ayrton, sitting back in his chair with a firm grip of the arms, was puffing his cigar as nonchalantly as might be, though his teeth almost met in it.

"That is news," he said, as Bloxham folded up his letter.

"Yes, I thought it would tickle you."

"It does," said Ayrton; "just think—of—old—Brodie—carrying on in that way!"

What on earth did it mean?

He gazed vacantly after Bloxham's retreating form. His mind was getting indurated by these constant shocks. What in heaven's name did it mean?

Was Bloxham fooling him? Or was Bloxham's

friend Easdaile fooling Bloxham? Or was someone on the boat fooling Easdaile? There was some horrible, grotesque mistake somewhere. But where it came in was quite beyond him. He brooded over the matter, but could make nothing of it.

Bloxham was evidently in sober earnest, and was delighted with the hand he had had in the matter. And his friend Easdaile was evidently in earnest too.

What, in the name of all that was horrible, did it all mean?

He gave it up. He even began to wonder what would happen next, and each day he braced himself up to meet the next blow.

He had not long to wait.

Just one week after Bloxham's curious communication, Ayrton sat at his desk finishing his morning's correspondence.

"That's all just now, Jevons," he said, and his shorthand clerk gathered up his belongings and departed. He reappeared in a moment with a letter.

"Registered letter just come, sir!" he said, and laid it on the desk.

Ayrton glanced at it.

"Leave it," he said curtly, through his clenched teeth, and Jevons disappeared.

Ayrton waited till his footsteps died away down the passage, then he quietly fastened the door, and came back, and stood looking at the letter, with eyes strained and startled, as the rabbit in the serpent's cage looks at the monster which is about to swallow him.

He dropped into his chair. His face was livid to

the lips, and clench his jaw never so tight he could not keep his mouth from contorting and twisting, in a fashion that spoke of unstrung nerves and bodily weakness.

The letter was in the handwriting of John Brodie. It bore a Ceylon stamp, and was postmarked Colombo. He sat and gazed at it in horror.

Twice he raised his hand toward it, and twice the hand fell to his side before it reached the letter. Should he open it? or should he burn it unopened? No—open it he must. It might—it must—cast some light on the mystery that was driving him crazy.

He staggered to his feet and went to a cupboard and poured out a glass of brandy and drank it off.

Then with nerveless fingers, and a cold spasm of horror, he at last picked up the letter, hurriedly sliced it open, and spread out before him on the desk the thin sheet of foreign paper it contained.

He gripped the arms of his chair, and bent over the desk and read:

“After what occurred at our last interview it is with extreme reluctance that I force myself to write to you. It is likely that after what took place then you have considered the advisability of quitting the country. I forbid you to do so. You will stop where you are and attend to the business of the firm. I require you in London, and I expect you to carry out my instructions to the letter. Any default on your part will be followed by a demand on mine for a settlement in full between us, and the reckoning will be a heavy one.

“JOHN BRODIE.”

Ayrton read the letter twice, slowly and carefully, before any sense of its meaning penetrated his understanding. His brain was numb with the shock of it.

The first reading showed him that the letter was unmistakably in Brodie's writing.

The second time he read it the menace of it struck him blow upon blow, till he bent under it, and sat with his head in his hands utterly overwhelmed and confounded.

Then he started up with a gleam in his eyes. If Brodie wrote that letter—and no other man on earth could have written it—then Brodie was not dead, and he had not killed him, and his soul was not stained with that greatest crime.

But he sank down into his chair again, and the room began to swim slowly round and round. If Brodie was alive—if Brodie wrote that letter—what in heaven's name was it that was sealed up in that case in the Safe Deposit Vaults—sealed up with Brodie's own seal?

Could the dead man have come to life in the night, and forced his way out of the case, and sealed it up and gone on his way, making no sign and leaving him to swelter in the hell he had made for himself? Would to God he could! But it was impossible. What was sealed up by him that night was what was still in the case in the Safe Deposit. For the seal was unbroken, and just as he had left it, and the only seal that could make that impression had been in his possession all that night.

He remembered quite well looking at the seal as the box was carried down into the strong room, and he was familiar with it, and could not be mistaken.

Then, if Brodie's body was still in the case, how could Brodie write that letter from Colombo, and who else but Brodie could possibly have written it?

It was beyond him! It was Brodie's double, risen up to take vengeance on him.

But what a business-like letter for a ghost to write! Only one man could have written it, and that was John Brodie!

Was it possible the case was not as he left it? Could Brodie have come to life in the Safe Deposit?

There was one thing he could do, and he would do it at once, whatever the result. He would see that case with his own eyes, and compare the seal with the one in the old safe.

He unlocked the safe, groped among Brodie's things for the seal, and put it into his pocket. Then he carefully burnt the letter and the envelope, and jumped into a cab and drove off to Chancery Lane.

Arrived at the Safe Deposit he was courteously received by the son of Anak in charge of the barrier, and escorted by him down the stairs to the office.

"I want Strong-Room No. 905," he said.

"What name, if you please, sir, and your check number?"

"Name, Brodie—check number—I don't remember—did you give me one?"

"About what date did you take the room?"

"About five weeks ago."

The manager turned to his ledger, found the entry, and then swung round:

"Are you Mr. Brodie himself?"

At the unexpected query, and in the instant at his

disposal, Ayrton tried to fathom the implication of either answer. But the time was too short for him to weigh one against the other. His one idea was to get at the case, and the affirmative seemed the shortest cut to it, so he answered:

“Yes.”

But the momentary hesitation was enough for the keen-eyed manager. As courteously as might be, he said:

“I am very sorry to put you to any inconvenience, Mr.—Brodie,—but as one of our clients you will, I am sure, appreciate our over-caution even at your own expense. My predecessor lost his post here three weeks ago through neglecting the usual precautions, and that is why I am here. I am sorry, and it may seem ridiculous to you, but I shall have to ask you to identify yourself. One of my clerks shall go with you to your bank, if you wish. It is a mere formality, of course, but our existence depends upon our caution. So you must excuse it.”

Ayrton's first impulse was to hit the man, but he saw the absurdity of it, and besides, another son of Anak, twin brother to the guardian of the barrier apparently, stood in the doorway, with a benevolent smile on his face.

It was decidedly awkward. If the bank was requested to specifically identify James Ayrton as John Brodie, they would, to say the least of it, think it curious.

How to get out of the fix now?

A gleam of reason came to him.

“I will call on Monday. I can't wait now. Then your clerk can go with me;” and so into his cab again,

and back to the City, inwardly raging and fuming, and cursing his own folly in using Brodie's name in the matter at all.

CHAPTER VII.

A GLEAM OF HOPE.

As his cab turned out of Chancery Lane into Holborn his eye caught the contents bill of an evening paper:

LOSS OF A STEAMER WITH ALL HANDS.

It did not interest him. It needed more than the loss of a steamer, or of a dozen steamers with all hands, to interest him in these times. He was boiling with anger at what had just happened, and his brain was beating like a metronome to the tune of "What does it mean? What does it mean? Is Brodie alive? Who wrote that letter?"

A big *Globe* contents bill came sailing along the street with a yelling small boy hidden behind it, and Ayrton read:

LOSS OF THE "POONAH" WITH ALL HANDS.

Good God! the *Poonah*. That was Brodie's ship! He dashed his hand through the trap and shouted:

"Get me a *Globe*—quick!" and sat with his heart on fire.

The man drew up, whistled to the small boy, who

sprang on to the step, and shoved the opened sheet into the cab.

"Here y'are, sir. Loss o' ther *Pooner*'n all 'ands! Thank yer, sir!" as Ayrton threw him sixpence and grabbed the paper. "'Ope yer friend aint among 'em, sir!"

"Drive on!" shouted Ayrton, and wrestled with the flapping paper till he found the paragraph.

It was a tersely worded cable from Lloyd's agent at Hong-Kong, and ran thus:

"S. S. *Djellala* arrived to-day, reports terrific cyclone off Annam Coast. Passed large quantities of wreckage of large steamer, life-buoys and boats marked *Poonah*. *Poonah* not been spoken last three days; feared she has sunk with all hands."

He leaned back in his cab with a sigh of relief.

Brodie's ship sunk with all hands! That included Brodie, and he was free. Nothing better could have happened to him. Certainly the big speculation in China would all fall to pieces, and the firm would suffer heavy loss; but that was nothing in comparison with the personal relief which the disappearance of Brodie would afford him.

He would be free now from the torturing worries of the last six weeks, free to devote himself with a single mind to the getting together of a sufficient sum with which to leave the country.

But there!—it all came back upon him with a cold shock. Good heavens! he was arguing on the basis of John Brodie being on the *Poonah*, when, as a matter of fact, his body lay in the Safe Deposit Vaults. Well,

no matter whether Brodie's body lay below Chancery Lane or beneath the waves of the China Sea, he was done with him, and the mystery that had been like to turn his brain was at an end, and his heart felt lighter than it had done for weeks past.

He bade the man drive to the office of the P. and O. Company, and there, masking his face in a gravity which was so nearly allied to a mad hilarity that he dared not look the clerk in the face lest his eyes should betray him, he inquired for further news of the *Poonah*.

They had none to give. The public were in possession of all the facts. But knowing how anxious Mr. Ayrton must be as to his partner's fate,—Ayrton's lips twitched, but he managed to control them,—they promised that any further news should be forwarded to him at once.

He encountered Bloxham on the street, and Bloxham was desirous of offering his condolences, but Ayrton wrung his hand and said:

"Excuse me, old man, can't stand any more just now;" and hurried away lest he should break out into inextinguishable laughter before his face.

The news had reached the office, and something of the quietude of a house of mourning pervaded it. In speaking to Ayrton the clerks addressed him in the low tones of respectful sympathy.

He ordered the various editions of the *Globe* and *Pall Mall* to be sent in to him as they came out, and the office-boy who brought them in laid them on the table with the manner of one laying wreaths on a grave.

Ayrton read every word of every account, and gath-

ered comfort and hope from a short leaderette in one of the late editions, which commented on the deadly suddenness and destructiveness of the Eastern cyclones, and held out little hope of any survivors being picked up.

He went to his Club again for the first time in many weeks, ate a hearty dinner, and got a novel enjoyment from the taste of the food, and then went on to his chambers in good spirits.

The incident of the letter he had received in the morning rose up before him now and again like a black cloud on his clearing horizon, but he crushed it down and tried not to think of it. It was too utterly beyond his comprehension. It contained the germs of madness. He would have none of it.

In spite of his still painful thumb he slept better that night.

He bought all the morning papers, but they contained no fresh news. The consensus of opinion was that the last had been heard of the ill-fated *Poonah* and her passengers. So much the better for him. He would gladly—so warped was his mind by the tension and the shocks it had suffered from—have sunk the whole P. and O. fleet to insure the destruction of the writer of that menacing letter, whoever and whatever he was.

In the City he had to accept with grave face the condolences of Brodie's many friends, who each and all felt it incumbent on them to come in and chat over the event, with eulogies of the departed, and urgent advice to Ayrton to keep up his spirits and hope for the best.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE VALLEY OF SHADOWS.

DAY after day passed, and each day rendered less and less likely any contradiction of the reported loss of the *Poonah*, and each day Ayrton's spirits rose higher.

He got regular sleep every night now, his health began to improve, and the careworn, harassed look left his face.

His acquaintances spoke highly of the nerve and self-control which carried him so bravely through this trying time—for it was generally recognized that the loss of Brodie would be almost irreparable to the firm.

Then one morning, exactly one week after the reported loss of the *Poonah*, one of the chief clerks from the P. and O. office came bustling and beaming in, with the air of one to whom any lack of the usual observances would be forgiven on account of the importance of the news he bore.

"Great news for you, Mr. Ayrton,—promised to let you know at once,—here it is, just going out to the press," and he handed Ayrton a carbon-copied flimsy.

But the letters swam before Ayrton's eyes. He said hoarsely: "Read it out," and reached for a cigar.

And the chief clerk read:

"Hong Kong—Steamer *Derwent* arrived here this morning, bringing following sole survivors of *Poonah*, foundered in hurricane of January 3. John Brodie, Merchant, London; Isobel Easdaile, Kendal, Eng-

land; John Stewart, Abel Peters, seamen, and James Death, steward, picked up on life-raft four days ago by *Derwent*. All recovering."

Ayrton steeled himself to shake hands with the chief clerk and thank him.

"Great news," he said, "and I am immensely obliged to you for letting me know," and as soon as he was rid of his visitor, he jumped into a cab and drove off home. In another half hour the news would be generally known. Bloxham and the rest would have come crowding in to overwhelm him with their congratulations, and he felt that his brain could not stand it.

That night was an awful one for him. The specters he had thought laid forever sprang up afresh, and tortured him with tenfold energy. He never closed his eyes, but paced the room like a caged beast all night long. He cursed the *Poonah* and he cursed the *Derwent*. He cursed John Brodie and he cursed himself.

No human brain could stand the terrible strain of this shuttle-cocking between desperate hope and agonizing fear. His whole nervous system seemed suddenly to go to pieces.

In the grim gray of the dawn, he caught sight of his face in the glass and recognized that his time was up—that he could stand no more.

He braced himself with brandy, took pencil and paper and made a few notes, and as soon as a telegraph office was open, sent a wire to his shorthand clerk to come up to him at once.

"I am breaking down, Jevons," he said, when he arrived, "overworked, I suppose. Take down my

instructions and tell Mr. Sanders to carry them out exactly till I come back. I may be away a week, it may be a month."

He scoured his reeling brain to the task, gave clear and concise directions for the carrying on of the business, forbade any communication with him or the forwarding of any letters or telegrams, save only those from China, which were to be sent up unopened to his rooms, and dismissed the clerk.

Then he carefully packed a small valise, emptied his pockets of papers and letters, and locked up in his small safe every scrap that could give a clue to his identity—told the porter he might be away for a month, and bade him keep carefully any letters that came for him—walked fifty yards down Piccadilly, called a cab, and drove to Paddington, and thence took train to Richmond. There he sought out a certain medical establishment on the hill which he had heard highly spoken of.

He rang the bell and demanded audience of the doctor.

"My name is John Adams," he said. "I have been overworking, and am on the eve of a breakdown. I want you to pull me through. Here is fifty pounds on account. Give me the quietest room in the house, and get me a trained nurse."

The tall, thin, careworn doctor looked at him quietly, felt his pulse, laid a thin, cool hand on his burning forehead, and said, in a thin, gentle voice, "Yes, you are only just in time! You ought to have come to me before. What is the latest drug you have been trying—without effect?"

Ayrton named his latest speciality in soporifics.

"Aye, aye! Well, get to bed at once, and I will pull you through. Do you want to say anything more to me before you go?"

"Nothing," said Ayrton.

Before nightfall his troubled spirit was fluttering away down toward the gates of death, his body was heaving and straining against the merciful straps that bound him to his bed, and in wild delirium all the pent-up agonies of the last six weeks were pouring out in half-coherent ravings, which, in his right mind, he would have bitten his tongue off sooner than have given utterance to.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ANGEL OF LIGHT.

THE days ran into weeks, and they tended him carefully and skillfully. And the remote upper room, where, with a premonition of what was before him, Ayrton had insisted on being installed, was filled for days and nights with the creaking and straining of the stout wooden bedstead to which he was bound, and with the wild ravings of his delirium; then,—when his strength was spent and the dividing line between life and death was but a thread,—with the dreadful silence made but the heavier by the sound of the slow, heavy breathing which seemed ever on the point of stopping, but yet went on; and then at last, when the wavering scale turned, with the peace and quiet of slow convalescence.

It was a bright, warm, spring Sunday morning when Ayrton put in his first appearance at the break-

fast table downstairs. He was woefully wan and thin,—weak in body and broken in spirit, like a mediæval survivor of the rack or the wheel. He dropped into the first vacant chair near the door, and toyed with the food the attendants placed before him, grateful, after his long fight with the shadows, for the sight and sound of his fellows again.

Breakfast was over, but three or four of the inmates lingered at the other end of the table, debating still some question which had evidently been under discussion during the meal, and there was an occasional slight laugh from some of the group.

“Well, but, Miss Boone,” said a well-modulated man’s voice, in which lurked a suspicion of sarcastic humor, “you don’t mean to say you swallow the Bible whole?”

“No,” came the reply, in quiet tones, which sounded in Ayrton’s ears like a silver bell, “I am no whale. I swallow nothing whole. But I can accept much that I cannot explain. This egg, for instance! I have enjoyed it, but the process of manufacture is beyond me.”

“Ah! that’s just what stumps me. When I find a flaw in an argument I naturally doubt the whole.”

Ayrton recognized the voice now, and the speaker—a well-known Q. C. and Member of Parliament.

“See here now,” he went on. “Tell me, Miss Boone, whom did Cain marry?”

“I’m sure I don’t know.”

“Ah, well! tell me this! God made the sun and moon on the fourth day of Creation, but the three previous days had both day and night. How was that managed?”

“I really don’t see what it matters whom Cain married, or what kind of light there was during those first three days. It must have been a very glorious light, and it is easy for me to believe that the Maker of sun, moon, and stars could make a light of His own if He needed it.”

“Can you explain the mysteries of the New Testament? The Incarnation, the Resurrection, and so on?”

“No, thank God, I cannot! I am grateful that there are still left some things which no one can explain or understand. If I could understand God in full, He would no longer be to me what He is.”

She was quite a young girl, not more than nineteen or twenty, Ayrton judged, with delicate, almost transparent, complexion, and large deep-brown eyes. She was dressed in dark blue set off by red ribbons, and was strikingly pretty, though painfully thin both in face and figure.

The quiet, easy, composed way in which she spoke of these matters, not usually made subjects of public discussion, attracted Ayrton’s notice, and as he looked at her, and enjoyed looking, she rose suddenly, pressing her handkerchief to her lips, and hurriedly left the room. The rest of the party broke up, the Q. C. saying as he rose:

“I admire enthusiasm, though I never experienced it myself, but hard common sense carries further in this world.”

It was so bright and warm that the doctor ordered Ayrton out into the sunshine.

He found himself so weak, however, that his walk extended only as far as the gardens opposite, which

sloped down to the river and were bathed in sunshine.

He found a secluded seat banked round with rhododendrons, upon which the sun shone full, and here he sat in great content, and gazed out over winding river and distant rolling hills, and drew in health with every delicious breath.

His mind was in much the same state as his body. It too had been sick—sick unto death—but it was recovering tone and strength.

The past with all its horrors was behind, and he resolutely refused to probe into it.

The future? He would face it as resolutely as might be.

During the last ten days, lying prone and helpless in that quiet upper room, he had been alone with his thoughts, and he had had time to think the matter out.

Full of horror and regret for the past, he had decided that what was done could not be undone. He would leave the dead past to bury its dead. All that was left to him was to do whatever duty came to him in the future as resolutely and as manfully as might be. If discovery came, and punishment—well! If not—again well! Whatever came he would face it. One thing only he recoiled from, and that was any further attempt to solve the hideous mystery which his crime had generated. It contained all the possibilities of madness.

He had sinned beyond most men. He had suffered too beyond most. Surely it had not been given to many to suffer torment and torture such as had racked him down to the gates of death.

A light slow footstep came down the wooden steps

by the side of his seat. It was the young lady of the breakfast table, but at first he hardly recognized her in the uncouth blue poke bonnet she wore. It was hideous enough, but presently it seemed to him that it only heightened the rare delicate sweetness of her face.

This was evidently her favorite seat. At sight of him she stopped and half turned to mount the steps again.

Ayrton rose. "Pray don't let me turn you away from your seat."

"Oh, please don't move. I have no special claim on it," she replied, with a smile that made Ayrton think of wild blush roses.

"Except that of custom perhaps," he said, and then a sudden impulse moved him. "May I speak to you? I heard you at the breakfast table this morning."

"Oh!" said the girl, looking at him, "are you at Dr. Kilgour's, too?"

"I have been there three weeks."

"I don't remember seeing you."

"No, this morning was the first time I have been downstairs. I have been very close to death."

She was still standing, half hesitating.

"Do, pray, sit down," said Ayrton. "If you prefer it I will go."

She sat down, saying, "No, don't go! What did you wish to say to me?"

He sat down too, and remained so long with his eyes fixed apparently on the Surrey hills that the girl looked at him once or twice, and wondered if he had forgotten his last words.

His reticent, self-contained nature found it difficult

to break the ice. It was only the feeling that he had that this girl was more soul than body that enabled him to do so now.

At last he spoke, and his voice was husky with the weight of his feeling.

"How much shall a man be forgiven?"

The girl's eyes deepened and brightened.

"Until seventy times seven," she answered.

"Aye—trivial faults. But greater sins?"

"Forgiveness has no limits."

"None?"

"None."

"How do you know?"

"Because the God within me tells me so."

"You are a Salvationist?"

"Yes, I am James Boone's daughter, and I am dying. My life may go out like a candle any day. I am waiting for the end."

"And you have no fear?"

"Fear? No. What should I fear?"

Ayrton turned and looked into her eyes, and saw there what he had never seen before—the Perfect Peace. Then his own eyes wandered off to the hills again, and again a great silence fell between them.

And then, in a voice that was barely more than a husky whisper—as a man may confess his sins to God—he said:

"A man slew his friend, without premeditation, yet at the moment with intention. He has suffered all the torments of hell. Can that be forgiven him?"

"Does he seek forgiveness with his whole soul?"

"He does"—the words fell from his lips like a groan.

"Then even that can be forgiven," and after a pause, the voice like a silver bell went on softly:

"They once brought to the Master for his condemnation one who had broken the law, and whom the law condemned to die. Do you remember what the Master's sentence was? 'Go, sin no more!'"

And again a silence fell between them. But presently she asked:

"Can he—the man you name—atone for his sin in any way?"

"I fear not. No restitution or atonement is possible."

"And he has suffered punishment?"

"Aye! as few men have suffered—but at the hand of God, not of man."

"That is far better. Men are purblind at best. Their punishments always savor of revenge. Dare you tell me more?"

"It is a terrible story!"

"I have heard many."

And presently, in husky, faltering tones, James Ayrton did what he never had expected to do in this world, told the story of his crime, briefly but clearly, and more—did what he had strenuously made up his mind never to do again—laid bare before this sweet-faced, clear-eyed girl the hideous mystery that had sprung out of his crime.

When the story was all told, and he had fallen silent, he felt the clear eyes burning full upon him.

"It is a terrible story," she said; "it is beyond belief almost."

"And yet I have suffered it, and lived through it."

The clear eyes were still upon him.

"No," he replied to the unspoken question in them. "I am quite sane. It is no hallucination bred of my illness. Would to God it were! It is all exactly as I have told you."

Presently the girl said, "I would like to think upon this matter. I cannot but think there is some great mistake somewhere. But in any case there is no trouble but there is a way out of it. There is no sin too great for forgiveness. The way of redemption may be hard, but there always is a way. What you have told me shall never pass my lips. You trust me?"

"I have trusted you as I never thought to trust anyone," and, standing before her with bowed head, he added, "I thank you for the hope you have given me;" then, with one more look into the great brown eyes, he turned and slowly climbed the steps and went up the path.

He did not see her again that day, and she did not appear at the breakfast table next morning.

When he went into the doctor's study to pay his morning visit, the tall, thin figure seemed to him grimmer and more reserved than ever. The doctor looked him over quietly and said:

"Your walk did you good."

"Yes, doctor, my walk did me good. Where is Miss Boone to-day? I did not see her at breakfast."

The doctor eyed him quietly and then said:

"She is dead. She broke another blood-vessel and died in her sleep."

"Dead! Good God! How terrible! Poor girl!"

"I don't know," said the doctor, very quietly. "I

doubt if she needs our pity. If ever there was a saint she was one."

"Could I—could I see her, doctor?"

"Why, I didn't know you knew her," with a faint indication of interest.

"Yes, I knew her," said Ayrton.

He was allowed to see her, and the sweet white face, placid and beautiful as the face of a sleeping angel, remained in his memory and brought to him a perpetual message of forgiveness and hope.

He kissed the smooth brow and went his way.

CHAPTER X.

BRODIE WANTS HIS BODY.

A WEEK later Ayrton returned to town to pick up the tangled threads of his life, and to make the best he could out of it.

He found a number of letters at his chambers, and among them two in the handwriting of John Brodie, one postmarked Singapore, the other Hong-Kong.

His heart surged and swelled painfully at sight of them, but he braced himself to open and read them.

They dealt entirely with business matters and made no reference to the past. Certain changes in the arrangements made before Brodie's departure were insisted on, and instructions laid down as to their carrying out. The end and aim of them all were to emphasize the fact that London would in future be entirely subordinate to, and dependent on, the Chinese branch of the business. In each letter the writer

signed himself simply "John Brodie," but in the left-hand corner of each, at the foot of the page, was the word "Remember."

Was he likely to forget?

However, his mind was made up to keep that page in his life turned down, and he strove with all his new powers to keep his mind off the great enigma.

There was a foreign paper with a Chinese stamp on. He listlessly tore off the wrapper and glanced at the contents. He had not to look far for the reason of its being sent to him.

The heading in large type caught his eye:

"THE SURVIVORS OF THE 'POONAH.'
THRILLING NARRATIVES. ROMANTIC
SEQUEL. MARRIAGE OF MR. BRODIE AND
MISS EASDAILE;"

and there followed a full account of the wedding at the British Consulate, with the names of all the British residents who had been present. There could be no doubt about it. It was published abroad to the whole world, as plainly as print could make it, that John Brodie had survived the disastrous wreck, and had married the only lady who had been saved.

Ayrton read all the details with apathetic amazement. John Brodie sailed, got wrecked, was saved, got married, and all the while his body lay securely sealed up in a case in the Safe Deposit Vaults.

It was beyond belief—yet there it was. To dwell upon it meant madness, so he quietly accepted the facts as the world accepted them, and turned resolutely to the work that lay to his hand.

And so the days crept on, burdened with the horror of this unsolved mystery of life and death, and the weeks became months, and James Ayrton worked early and late with one sole end in view—that of gathering together enough capital to make a fresh start in a new world.

Brodie wrote regularly by each mail, terse business letters, to which Ayrton replied in kind. The great speculation had proved a triumphant success, but none of the profits were remitted to England, and the London office simply acted on orders received from China and sank into the second place.

Ayrton stuck doggedly to his post, and bore his woeful burden with such grim equanimity as he could muster.

It was appalling even to himself at times to find himself sitting at his desk reading Brodie's letters and answering them, and knowing all the time that Brodie had, beyond all doubt, died by his hand that night nearly twelve months ago.

At times he tried to cheat himself into the belief that the whole matter was after all a horrible hallucination, as that girl at Richmond had told him it must be. But he had only to unlock the old safe behind him, and he did it more than once, and to view the battered relics it contained, to assure himself of the reality of the matter.

At times the torture of doubt became so excruciating that even the fell certainty gave relief. And more than once he was driven to the point of attempting once more to recover possession of the case from the Safe Deposit people, in order to solve the doubts that wore his life thin.

The flight of time was emphasized by the arrival of a newspaper from China, which announced the birth of a son to John Brodie at Shanghai.

Then came two startling events, following close one after the other, which stirred up within him all those fears which had gradually quieted down during the past uneventful months, and drove him at last to decisive action.

The first was a letter from Brodie, which ran thus, and Ayrton's hair bristled at the roots as he read it:

"You will please send out to me by first steamer the case marked J. B. 22,222, which contains my"—(a word had been erased here, and over it had been written "books,"—but to Ayrton's horrified eyes the under word was clearly visible—it was "body.")

He rubbed his eyes, and gazed at it long and fixedly, and the horrors and terrors of those first few weeks came back upon him with all their force.

What in the name of all that was horrible could this re-incarnate John Brodie want with the other John Brodie's body?

There was only one conclusion possible. The fictitious John Brodie was so well satisfied with his position that he wanted to consolidate it, and to make sure of never being ousted from it by the sudden and unexpected coming to light of the real John Brodie's body.

CHAPTER XI.

AN ANGEL OF ANOTHER COLOR.

AYRTON pondered the matter gloomily for a time, then suddenly it flashed into his mind that here was the way to obtain from the Safe Deposit people the case which he had been unable to get possession of the last time he tried.

He still saw difficulties, but his brain was already planning how to overcome them.

He could not go in person for the case. If the Safe Deposit officials again requested his identification as John Brodie, he would be in exactly the same predicament as before. He bitterly regretted the shortsightedness which had caused him in the first instance, when depositing the case, to give Brodie's name instead of his own.

As he could not go himself he must send someone else, and to fully justify his not appearing in person he must be out of the country.

He decided to take a run over to Wilhelmsbad for his health, and from there to send Brodie's letter and the key of the Safe Deposit Vault to his head clerk, with full instructions how to act in the matter.

Where to have the case taken to was the next thing to be decided. It would never do to have it taken to the office. That meddling old ruffian Jenks would certainly be delving into it to see how the governor's books were getting on.

He determined to take a cottage for the season somewhere up the river, in as lonely a situation as

could be found. He would have the case sent there, and then if possible would bring himself to the task of burying out of sight forever the hideous evidence of his crime.

He put the matter in hand at once, and within a week was in possession of a tiny furnished house not far from Chertsey, and within a few minutes' walk of the river. It was old-fashioned and cramped, and correspondingly uncomfortable and inconvenient, but it stood all by itself, and it possessed a garden large enough to bury a regiment in.

He took the house in the name of John Adams, paid three months' rent in advance, and arranged with an old lady from the village to come in and "do for him," whenever he chose to come from Saturday to Monday, and to keep an eye on the place meanwhile, with a view to its being ready for him to run down to at any odd time when the fancy took him.

The old body was at great pains to explain and apologize for her not being able to sleep at the cottage or to give her whole time to him, as she had her own old man to look after, and as he was an invalid she could not leave him altogether.

"If anything happens to my old man," she said cheerfully, "I'll come in and take care of you all the time, but so long as he's above ground I'm bound to do what I can for him, though he be somewhat of a trial at times."

Ayrton assured her that the arrangement would suit him perfectly, as he was accustomed to live alone; and he fervently wished the old man a long and happy life.

The arrangements for his trip abroad were soon

made. He gave them to understand at the office that his health was giving way again, and that by his doctor's orders he was going to try the baths at Wilhelmsbad. And during his stay there he was to be troubled with business matters as little as possible. The Chinese correspondence alone was to be forwarded to him. All other details Mr. Sanders must undertake himself.

Ayrton was sitting in his private room, busy at work, completing the arrangements for his continental trip, when the office boy came in to say that a lady wished to see him.

"Send Mr. Sanders here," said Ayrton, looking up with a frown. And, as the head clerk appeared,—
"Sanders, see who it is who is wanting me. I am busy and don't want to be disturbed." Sanders departed and reappeared shortly with the information that the lady insisted on seeing Mr. Ayrton in person.

"Does she give her name?"

"No, sir. All I could get from her was that she brings an introduction from Mr. Brodie."

"From Mr. Brodie?" echoed Ayrton. Then—collecting himself—"Well, show her in." And Sanders ushered in a lady dressed in an extremely well-fitting tailor-made costume of dark blue. She was tall and slim, and distinctly well-favored, both in face and figure, but Ayrton did not recognize her as of his acquaintance. Her first act was somewhat surprising. As Sanders retired she quietly stepped to the door, and giving him a moment to get out of hearing, she looked over the fastenings and then coolly pulled down the catch of the Yale and so locked the door against intruders. Then she turned to the astonished

Ayrton and said, with a smile which evoked no response:

"My business is strictly private. We shall be better *tête-à-tête*."

She spoke with a piquant French accent, and her very first words set a chord in Ayrton's memory vibrating, though for the moment he could not place her. His thoughts were still busily turning up the dust heaps of the past, in search of her identity, when she spoke again.

"You are Mr. James Ayrton?"

"I am."

"Thanks! That is one point gained. Have you seen Mr. John Adams lately?"

"Ah!" his knitted brows lost their perplexity, and his jaw tightened with an apprehension of what was coming. He remembered her well enough now. The last time he saw her was in his sick room at Richmond. She had tended him carefully and skillfully all through his illness, but, sick to death both in mind and body, he had taken little notice of her. The change, too, from the severe simplicity of the nurse's dress to her present stylish costume altered her appearance completely.

He sat and gazed at her with sinking heart. He knew instinctively what this visit meant.

"Well?" he said at last.

"Well, Monsieur Adams-Ayrton. How is Mr. John Brodie?"

"Ah!"

"Mais oui!—ah!—c'est ça!"

"What of Mr. Brodie?"

"Exactly! Is he well?"

"He is in China. I heard from him yesterday."

"Really! how delightful! And Case No. 22,222? Is it still safe in the hands of the Safe Deposit Company?"

"It is still in their hands, Madame. Deposited there by Mr. Brodie himself."

"And it contains?"

"It contains Mr. Brodie's books."

"Yes, and—and—anything else, Monsieur Ayrton?"

"What else, Madame?"

"Ah, that is our secret, Monsieur. Yours and mine. It is not a thing to be talked about."

"Do you understand where this may lead you to, Madame?"

"Perhaps!—I know where it may certainly lead Monsieur to."

"You know nothing. The ravings of a sick man are misleading."

"Sometimes! We learn to discriminate, however."

"Well?"

"Well, Monsieur?" and she nodded her plumed head at him a dozen threatening times.

"I understand," he said.

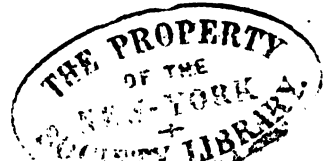
"Good! that will save my self-esteem, and the necessity for explanations."

"And your figure, Madame?"

"It has been much admired, Monsieur—my face also?" and her smiling mouth showed her pretty white teeth.

Ayrton's grim face glared at her like a carved mask.

"Your price, Madame?" he asked through his teeth.



"Ah, Monsieur, but that is brutal!—English, in fact!" her mouth smiled again, but her dark eyes sparkled keenly.

"Once more, Madame, your price?"

"It is a high one, Monsieur!"—the smile had left her lips, her face became sharp-set and eager, her eyes still sparkled dangerously. "You will marry me, Monsieur Ayrton!"

He sat back and glared at her from under his knitted brows.

"Marry you!" he said at last.

"Yes, marry me," she said quietly, "that way safety lies. Otherwise!" and she shrugged her trimly fitted shoulders and regarded him fixedly.

He only looked at her. Presently she said:

"I too have had my troubles. This is a chance not to be missed. United, our lives will stand firm."

He passed his hand wearily over his brow and took out a cigar. "Will you permit me?"

"I will even join you." She produced a dainty silver case and lit a cigarette—"I find it soothing to the nerves."

"I must have time to think this over," he said. "I am leaving in an hour for the Continent, by my doctor's orders. I shall be away three weeks."

"I will accompany you. I am a good nurse, as you know."

"That is impossible," he said, "I shall be with friends."

The daintily booted foot tapped impatiently against the table leg. Under cover of the smoke they were both thinking keenly and rapidly.

"This woman," reflected Ayrton, "knows enough

to bring about an investigation if I thwart her. An investigation means the end of all things. I can only gain time by appearing to come round to her ideas, and she is smart enough to suspect me if I come to it too readily. But she can only win her game by keeping quiet. She will threaten, but she has nothing to gain and everything to lose by raising dust. Therefore she will keep quiet. I will promise anything to gain time."

"He will promise me all I want and bolt at the first chance," she was thinking. "Still I can only threaten, and get all I can out of him. If I put the authorities on to the matter I ruin him, if things are as I think, but I gain nothing myself."

"What is your name?" asked Ayrton at last brusquely.

"Rose Belmont."

"Well, Madame Belmont, you are laboring under several mistakes. You probably think I am rich. That is mistake Number One. All the money this business makes goes into the pockets of John Brodie."

He said it so bitterly that Madame Belmont knew there was some truth in it, but at mention of John Brodie her black brows rose in amused disbelief.

"Then you doubt the existence of John Brodie? I understand just what you think. See here," and he lifted Brodie's last letter and handed it to her. "Notice the date and the signature. Now," he said, eying her keenly, "what do you make of that?"

He was curious to see what she would make of the great puzzle of his life. But she declined to concern herself with the matter.

"What is all that to me, Monsieur Ayrton? With two words I can have Case No. 22,222 inspected. Do you wish it? If not, you must marry me. *Voilà tout!*"

"I can give you neither wealth nor position."

"You can give me what I have long wanted, the protection of an honorable name. I say nothing about the man."

For a moment Ayrton felt inclined to throw up the game and fall in with her idea. She was a clever woman undoubtedly. It might be the simplest and least expensive way out of the difficulty. But the next moment his natural pride rose in arms at the idea of being coerced into such a union. He would do his best to beat her at her own game. His one strong point lay in the fact that her strength lay in her silence. The moment she disclosed her knowledge to others her power over him departed.

He smoked in silence till she grew impatient.

"Well?" she said at last.

He smoked on. Her foot tapped the table leg impatiently. At last he said, slowly and deliberately:

"I cannot bring myself to your views, Madame, in this fashion. Possibly further consideration may lead me to do so. If you will meet me here, on my return from the Continent three weeks hence, I will give you my decision."

"And meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile I promise to think over your proposition carefully."

"And I—meanwhile?"

"You must take your own course, Madame, and do whatever you think best—for your own interests."

"How do I know you will be here—three weeks hence?"

"This business is all I have to depend on. It is not much. As I have told you, Brodie takes most of the profits. But such as it is, it is all I have. I am tied to it for my living. I may deem it better to share the little there is with you than to pauperize myself by quitting it."

Madame's foot beat impatiently. She could not make much head against the position he was taking up.

"Then I must request you to give me a letter stating that you will marry me three weeks from now."

"I shall not do so."

"Then," she said, springing up, "I go straight to Scotland Yard."

"As you please. It is within your power to do so. Though I do not see what you gain by it."

"I do not gain, but you—you will suffer."

Ayrton simply bowed, and then added:

"I will call you a cab, and instruct the man to drive you there."

He took his hat, unfastened the door, and stood for her to pass out.

"This is your final decision?" she asked.

"Absolutely, Madame."

She passed out, he escorted her down the stairs to the street, hailed a cab, handed her into it, and told the man to drive to Scotland Yard.

"*Au revoir, Madame!*" he bowed to her, and the cab drove away. He knew well enough she would not go to the police.

CHAPTER XII.

PREPARING FOR FLIGHT.

AVRTON returned to his office, told Sanders that he could not now get away before the next day, and shutting himself up in his room, sat far into the night making further preparations for his departure. For his mind was made up to leave the office on the morrow, and never to return to it.

But to quit London for good and all meant that a sufficiency of funds must be accumulated to enable him to make a fresh start elsewhere, and this was a matter which needed careful planning.

Hour after hour he paced his room pondering possible schemes, and at last he saw his way clear.

One other thing he did that night, in view of the probability of his never returning to the office when he left it next day. He nerved himself to unlock, for the last time, the old safe in the wall, built a fire in the office grate, and carefully gave to the flames the things he had flung in there that horrible night long ago. Brodie's hat and coat, the contents of his portmanteau and the portmanteau itself, and the broken umbrella, so far as it would consume. The relics he gathered up and tossed into the safe again, locked it, and the first step in his emancipation from the nightmare that had ridden his life for so long was accomplished. Brodie's gold seal he slipped into his pocket, and tossed it overboard the next night, halfway between Harwich and Rotterdam.

In the morning he called in Sanders and gave him his final instructions, clearly and briefly.

“Mr. Brodie has determined on another big speculation, Sanders,” he said. “He only apprised me of it yesterday.” Putting two and two together, Sanders plumed himself on the bright idea that Mr. Ayrton’s visitor of the previous day had been the bearer of Mr. Brodie’s instructions. “It will take every penny we can scrape together here to carry out his ideas, and this realization and collection of funds I shall have to leave to you. You have the procuration of the firm, and you must exert yourself to the utmost to meet our requirements. The purchases will be mostly made abroad, and that I must undertake myself. I shall take one week’s rest at Wilhelmsbad, and then get through with the business at once. So within two weeks you must accumulate all funds possible, ready for my drafts upon you. Advise me daily, to the address I have given you, as to the progress you are making. Now do you understand clearly?”

“Perfectly, Mr. Ayrton. I will carry out your instructions to the letter. If I draw on Shanghai for the last shipment—I got the bills of lading this morning—and for the next two shipments, that will give us an additional five thousand pounds or so. Shall I do so?”

“Yes, that will help. Do so by all means. And, by the way, Sanders, I need hardly say it to you, but the less said about the matter the better. Keep your own counsel, and if my absence is remarked upon, I am at Wilhelmsbad under doctor’s orders. You understand?”

“Perfectly, Mr. Ayrton. You may rely upon my discretion.”

As he expected, he heard nothing of Madame Hel-

mont, and no summons came for him from Scotland Yard.

Nevertheless, every leap of the great steamer through the dark waters of the North Sea brought relief to his burdened soul, and the keen salt air sent the life pulsing through his veins faster than it had done for many a weary month.

A week of the waters and strong pine-scented breezes of Wilhelmsbad completed his outward cure, and growing bodily strength brought added relief to his mind.

There was one more thing to be done, one more evidence of his crime, and that the greatest of all, to be hidden out of sight forever, and then to possess himself of such funds as he could lay hands on, and to which, he argued with himself, no one in the flesh had a better right than he, and to disappear for all time.

His plans on this head had been carefully thought out. Immediately on receipt of the first letter from China, forwarded to him from the office according to his instructions, he wrote to Sanders and inclosed that portion of Brodie's previous letter which referred to the obtaining from the Safe Deposit Company, and forwarding to himself, the case No. 22,222 containing his books. Before sending the letter on, Ayrton carefully and deftly eliminated every trace and shadow of the under-word which had scorched his sight and curdled his blood as he read it.

He wrote: "You will see by inclosed letter from Mr. Brodie that he wishes sent out to him a certain case No. 22,222 deposited by him in the Safe Deposit Vaults in Chancery Lane, and now lying to his order there. He has not inclosed any formal order for

same, but his letter and the key which I send you herewith should be enough. You can explain to the Safe Deposit people, if they raise any formal objections to your having the case, that it is impossible for Mr. Brodie to apply in person, as he is in China, and that you are authorized to carry out his instructions. Having obtained the case, you will forward it to Mr. Brodie's friend, Mr. John Adams, Riverside Cottage, Chertsey, who has received full instructions as to what books Mr. Brodie wishes sent out, and will personally see to their repacking and shipment. Instruct the forwarding company to handle the case very carefully, as it contains, in addition to books, some delicate articles of bric-a-brac which must not suffer in transit. Carry out these instructions to the letter.

"P. S.—It just occurs to me that Mr. Adams, to whom I am writing by this mail, may be out of town for a day or two. Should that be so, tell the forwarding agents to apply to his housekeeper, a Mrs. Thew, who lives in the village, and whom they will have no difficulty in finding. She will see the case put into the cottage to await Mr. Adams's return. I hope, however, that he may be at home when the case arrives. I shall start on Thursday for Berlin, and after that shall be drawing upon you pretty continuously, according to the success I meet with in purchasing the goods I want."

Two days after the dispatch of this letter, Ayrton left Rotterdam by the night boat, and early the next morning he was at Riverside Cottage.

CHAPTER XIII.

THIS BODY OF DEATH.

AYRTON let himself in quietly, and cast a quick look of apprehensive anxiety around for the case. It had not yet arrived. It was almost a relief not to find it there. He carried his small handbag to his bedroom, and, wearied with his journey, flung himself on the bed.

He dozed off, but woke with a start at the sound of voices below his window. Peeping through the side opening of the linen blind, he saw a cart standing at the gate, and two men toilsomely unloading the case. The actual sight of the glaring black figures "J. B. 22,222," which for months had danced their devil's dance before his tortured eyes, made him sick with repulsion, and he gripped the window casing to steady himself. He braced himself up as well as he could.

"If the very sight of the case turns me sick," he said to himself, "how shall I get through with the rest of it?"

Someone was knocking at the door all this time, and now that someone came out into view, backing away from the door and scanning the window. It was one of his own clerks, and the sight of him brought Ayrton to himself again. Sanders, with a superfluity of zeal, had dispatched this man along with the case to insure its careful handling and safe delivery. The two men had managed to get the case to the ground without undue violence, and now the clerk gave one of

them directions for finding old Mrs. Thew, and started him on the quest, while he sat himself down on the case, and kicked his heels against it, and lighted a cigarette.

In due course Mrs. Thew came hobbling along, still vociferously panting out objurgations at this unseasonable call upon her services. She opened the door, and the three men staggeringly conveyed the case into the house.

The clerk insisted on the old lady signing a receipt for the case, which he wrote out in pencil in his pocket book, and she was as loath to do it as though she had been signing away her birthright. However, as the clerk declined to quit the house until he got the receipt, and was evidently quite prepared to make a day of it, if necessary, she finally gave way, and mistrustfully signed, much to the clerk's disgust, as he would quite have enjoyed lounging around all day and arguing the point with her. Deprived of any reasonable excuse for stopping longer, he at last withdrew with his minions in the direction of the Station Hotel, and Mrs. Thew began a tour of the house to satisfy herself that everything was in order, and to save her coming up again.

Ayrton heard her rattle about in the kitchen. He expected she would come upstairs, and hastily smoothing down the bed, he threw his bag into a tall wall-cupboard, took the key from the outside and inserted it on the inside, then squeezed in himself, and drew the door to and locked it. Presently the old lady came stumping upstairs and into his room. Through a crack in the door he saw her look suspiciously at the bed, and then run her hand in between

the sheets to feel how damp it was getting. Then she dandered about the room, set her cap straight at the glass, and came to his cupboard and tried the door. She seemed surprised at finding it fast, but finally she trotted away down the stairs, and presently he heard the front door slammed to and noisily locked, and her footsteps died away along the path.

Ayrton let himself out and flung himself on the bed again. He was not hungry, and he knew there would be nothing to eat in the cottage, but he felt very weary, and the life in him became thin and flaccid at thought of the work before him. Later on, after he had rested, he would stroll down to the village and get something to eat at the inn, get in some supplies, and show himself to Mrs. Thew, and tell her she need not come up, as he would be leaving early the next day, and he could provide for himself in the meantime. He doubted if his work would be done by then, but it might keep the old woman from coming up, and he did not want her about.

But he had barely dozed off when an imperative summons on the knocker of the door downstairs brought him to his feet again and to the peephole in the blind. And presently, after several more noisy assaults on the door, a lady backed into view, scanning the windows just as the clerk had done.

He drew back involuntarily with a subdued exclamation. It was his visitor at the office, Madame Helmont. How she could have found him out passed his comprehension. She must have tumbled across the name of John Adams as tenant of Riverside Cottage, and come along to ascertain if it was the John Adams she was in quest of.

Once or twice her glancing eyes met his, full and straight. He stood well back in the room, and he knew that it was impossible she could detect him, and yet, each time his eyes met hers, it thrilled him like an electric shock, and each time he half expected her to announce her discovery and demand admittance.

She attacked the knocker again, and failing to obtain any response she withdrew from the garden and walked down the road.

Ayrton hoped she had gone for good. He followed her with his eyes as far as the slit in the blind permitted, but was cautious enough not to betray his presence by any sign.

In five minutes she came back, raking the cottage with keen, searching glances. And now she set herself to a slow, steady patrol of the road, with the evident intention of not permitting anyone either to enter or leave the cottage without her knowledge.

Ayrton thanked his stars that the case had been safely lodged inside before she appeared. He wondered if she could possibly have noticed it *en route*, and followed it to its destination.

He watched her for some time, but she showed no sign of tiring or relaxing her vigilance.

The day dragged on. While there was no difficulty in obtaining food he had felt no sense of hunger. Now that it was quite impossible for him to obtain anything, he became painfully aware of an emptiness and a desire to eat and drink, which was as unreasonable as it was impossible of gratification.

He felt nervous about beginning his work on the case with that keen-eyed woman on the alert outside. The slightest sound would betray him into her hands.

But the time was passing, and the work had to be done.

He ground his teeth and stole quietly downstairs.

He had intended digging a big hole at the bottom of the garden, and burying the principal item of the contents of the case in it. But that was now out of the question.

So full of risk was the idea of unpacking the case, and so sickeningly distasteful, that he hesitated whether he would not leave it intact, simply remark it with his own initials and a new number, and take it along with him to the other end of the world, and there dispose of it.

But the thought of being tied for a moment longer than was necessary to that hideous body of death, of hauling after him wherever he went that ghastly evidence of his crime, and the knowledge of the appalling risks he ran in doing so, decided him to complete his work on the spot.

A slip from the slings on board ship—an accidental smash on the train—and the horror would be disclosed to a shuddering world. No, it must be got rid of—cost what it might in agony of soul and torture of body.

When he left Riverside Cottage and England he wanted to be done with the past forever. He wanted to strip himself of all outward evidence of his crime—to flee away to the uttermost end of the earth, there to begin and end a new life in such case as Providence might permit.

The garden being closed to him, his only chance lay in the cellar. He got a candle from the kitchen and descended the damp stone steps.

The atmosphere was sour and moldy. Huge white fungus growths stretched pallid groping fingers up the walls. They looked like fingers of death reaching up from below. The floor was of red bricks, but the lime with which they had been set had long since moldered away with the damp, and he saw there would be no difficulty in raising them.

Now to get the case downstairs. He dared not unpack it in the hall, lest old Mrs. Thew should return and find him at it.

He set to work, hauling first one corner, then the other, inch by inch, zigzagging toward the staircase.

It was terribly hard work for a man out of condition. He tugged and hauled till his brain felt full of blood, and the sinews of his arms cracked, and left him limp and strained as though he had been racked.

But it had to be done and without delay, and he stuck doggedly at it. It took him a full hour of this work to get the case to the stair head. Then a final heave sent it slithering down the steep, damp steps, and it landed at the bottom with a deadly thud, and a ghastly commotion in its contents which made Ayrton feel sick.

He was streaming with perspiration, and his legs would hardly carry him. He staggered to the kitchen for more candles, drew a jug of water at the tap, and stumbled downstairs to complete his ghoulish work.

Then he remembered he would need a spade, so crept up again and opened the back door cautiously, and so to the tool-house, where he found what he wanted. Then down again to the cellar, locking the

door at the head of the steps behind him—locking himself in with his victim.

He sank down, trembling and panting, on the damp bricks by the side of the case. And now indeed the curse was heavy on him. All the horror and anguish of his crime were increased tenfold by this wretched necessity for toiling and molling to hide away the hideous evidence of it. He shook as with an ague. A clammy dew broke out on his forehead, and the beaded drops rolled down his face like bitter tears of repentance.

He nerved himself to his task at last, inserted the chisel he had brought beneath the iron band that bound the ends of the case, and levered it up.

With infinite toil, and many a ragged wound to his unaccustomed hands, he at last got the lid raised. The tin lining was swelled up tight against it, as though something inside were trying to get out. His teeth were clenched. He breathed through his nose in short panting snorts, like a wild beast in extremity. His face was ridged with furrows so deep that his whole aspect was changed. If old Mrs. Thew had seen him, she would not have known him.

He would have liked to stop for a rest. The chisel rattled like a castanet whenever it touched anything. But he could not stop. He must get on—get on—and have done with it before he dropped.

With an energy akin to hysteria and madness, he drove the chisel into the swollen inner case of tin, and a gush of heavy mingled odors came out with a sound like a sigh.

He worked the chisel round the edge of the cover, and at last it was loose all round. He raised it, and

with a sob of anguish, and eyes almost closed in repulsion, and deadly sick at heart, he rapidly drew out the top layer of books. . .

Then Nature had her way. He sank down in a huddled heap on his knees, dropped his head on his arms on the side of the case, and actual bodily sickness laid hold of him, and convulsed him till it seemed as though his soul would be cast out of his body. . .

Ayrton's recollections of the things he did that night were as confused and as misty as the manner and the atmosphere in which he did them.

For months afterward, until they got overworn by other matters, they returned upon him at times in the long night watches, and startled him from sleep in a cold sweat of terror. And for years the smell of un-snuffed candles and burning candle-grease turned him sick and faint.

He toiled at his distasteful task doggedly and mechanically, the spur of horrible necessity goading him on and keeping him to it, while the air of the cellar grew thick and heavy with the mingled odors of the guttering candles, the mold, and the fungus, the raw, damp, newly-turned earth, and the sickening pungency which hung round the case and its contents.

He loosened the bricks of the floor, and in his agonized haste tore them up with his hands till his fingers were ragged and bleeding. He dug till his back felt broken. Carefully and cautiously he carried up load after load of earth on a piece of the lid of the case, and distributed it broadcast over the meadow at the foot of the garden, in fear and trembling every instant, lest that keen-eyed Frenchwoman should still be on the watch, and should venture round the house in her re-

searches. There were other things he did that night, with a view always of preventing identification if ever the body should be turned up, but when the recollection of these came back on him and he could not get rid of them, as sometimes happened, he slammed to the doors of his memory with the strongest drugs he could obtain.

But at last the hideous bricks were re-laid as care and he piled all the coal dirt on top of them, and so that buried out of sight—out from the bottom of his site.

The books he tore to pieces by leaf, covers and all, till the tin-lining of the case he packed till it formed a compact mass; himself he forced apart, and with sticks about an inch in width, shaking, after ten of the night spent, he climbed the stairs, washed off what he could, and tumbled on to his bed.

He was up by four o'clock; dawn he gathered up his sticks which represented a flat tin wedge which had been at the back, locking the door underneath it; and so, slipping through the hedge, and came to the river.

He flung in the tin-lining sticks, and then tramped away down the tow-path

toward Shepperton, throwing in stick after stick, till all were gone. At Shepperton he got food, and then, not daring to rest, he traveled by a circuitous route to Harwich, and there took boat for Rotterdam, and thence to Wilhelmsbad.

A full week's rest there, and he started on his travels, stopping at various towns, and passing drafts on the London house, until he had accumulated between six and seven thousand pounds.

Then he wrote to Sanders that he found it would be necessary for him to run over to New York, and he would sail two days later by the Hamburg-American liner *Strelsau* from Hamburg, and he booked a passage on her at the Berlin office of the company.

He started for Hamburg by a night train which would leave him only a couple of hours to spare before the sailing of the steamer. And in the middle of night, as they were leisurely grinding and groaning their way through unknown lands, he was flung suddenly out of his seat into the sonorous and odorous embrace of the stout German who had been sitting opposite to him, and their journey came to an unexpected end. They had run into a shunting goods train, and the line was strewn with bales and packages and barrels, and with the remains of the first two carriages and their inmates.

It took hours to clear the line and resume traffic, and Ayrton saw that all chance of catching his steamer had gone.

He cursed the delay—and lived to bless it.

There was no other steamer from Hamburg for a week. A Transatlantic boat left Havre the next day but one. Money was no object, and time to him was

everything. He turned his face to the south and reached Havre in time to catch the *Ville de Rouen* just an hour before she sailed.

As he left the railway-station for the quay, he bought a *Times* at the bookstall, and the first thing that caught his eye was an account of the sinking of the *Strelsau* in the North Sea within a few hours of her sailing. She had been run into by a tramp steamer, her side stove in, and she sank within a few minutes, only half a dozen of her crew being saved. A full list of passengers was published, and his own name appeared among them.

Book III.

REDEMPTION.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST STEP TOWARD FREEDOM.

ARRIVED at San Francisco, Ayrton immediately set about the realization of his projects.

He registered at the Palace Hotel in the name of James Angaray, and, on the very evening of his arrival, strolled away down to the wharves to learn if there was any Island trading schooner about to sail, and if he could obtain passage on board of her.

There were several newly arrived, but none on the point of sailing, and his nervous anxiety could brook no delay. He was returning to his hotel, disappointed and irritated, when he came across a schooner lying in a side dock, a homely, comfortable craft, built with an eye to space rather than to speed.

"Just the boat that would suit me, if only she were going where I want," he said to himself, and stood for a moment looking at her.

A tall, thin, tanned individual was leaning over the side, spitting meditatively into the water.

Angaray gazed at the schooner, the thin man gazed at Angaray.

"Well, will she do?" drawled the thin one at length.

"She might."

"Might what?"

"Might do."

"Ah!" and he resumed his congenial occupation. After another expectorative pause he said: "Wanting a schooner about this size?"

"That depends."

"'Pends on what?"

"Well, several things. Want to sell?"

The long one eyed him meditatively and spat several times, and finally:

"That depends."

"Ah! Depends on what?"

"Well," (spit—spit) "several things."

The tall one smiled. Angaray was amused. He pulled out his cigar-case and offered a cigar.

"Thanks, I chew. Have a plug?" biting one off himself.

"Thanks, I smoke." And each proceeded to enjoy himself in his own fashion.

After a pause for refreshments the chewer spoke again.

"Like to look over her?"

"Don't mind if I do," and Angaray stepped on board, and the other led the way down three steps, into the raised deck-house.

It was uncommonly roomy for the size of boat, and was fitted in comfortable though homely fashion.

They sat down in the cabin, and the thin man inquired:

"What do you want to buy a boat for?"

"Had an idea of cruising among the Islands, perhaps settling there."

The other eyed him with fresh interest, and chewed his cud with new vigor.

"Trade?"

"No, change—amusement."

Another long pause, while the chewer's jaws worked slowly and regularly.

"Any special rowt you want worked out?"

"No, I want a six months' cruise, with option of stopping off anywhere I choose."

"Like to charter her?"

"What's the figure?"

After much wary fencing Angaray found himself in possession of an offer of the *Bluewing* schooner, one hundred tons' burden, for a six months' cruise among the Islands, for the sum of two thousand dollars, and he promised to let Captain Barracott have his decision the next day.

At his hotel he obtained the name of a reputable ship-broker, and was fortunate enough to find him in his office, smoking and drinking with the captain of a vessel which had arrived from the Islands that very day. Angaray waited till their discussion was finished, and then tackled the old broker on the subject of Barracott and the *Bluewing*.

The broker smiled at Angaray's first question.

"So you've tumbled across Barracott, have you? He's a character."

"Anything wrong with him?"

"Oh, nothing wrong, 'cept that he's cracked."

"Cracked? I saw no signs of it. He struck me as remarkably shrewd."

"Shrewd! You bet your bottom dollar he's shrewd, but he's cracked all the same. Did he name treasure to you?"

"Not a word."

"Jim Barracott's as fine a sailor as steps, and a straight man into the bargain, but—he's got that old bee in his bonnet, wrecked treasure, and it's ruined him."

"Tell me about it."

"Seven years ago he was second mate of a ship that ran on a reef in the South Pacific. Captain and other men drowned. Barracott the only officer saved. He says the ship had treasure aboard, and his whole life since then has been given to searching for it. He worked hard, and bought the *Bluewing* out of his savings. Since then he has made three voyages searching for his treasure, and has not struck it yet. He's no more money left to fit her out again, and he's just eating his heart out at thoughts of all those dollars lying at the bottom of the sea, and him wanting them so badly. Next time you meet just casually introduce the subject of treasure, and see how you get on."

Angaray thought the matter over during the night. He felt drawn toward the man. If he was as good a seaman as old Jakins the broker said, the treasure twist would rather play into his hands than otherwise.

He strolled down to the out-of-the-way wharf again next day. Barracott was just where he had left him, leaning over the side, spitting meditatively. He might have been there all night.

A sparkle came into his eye when he caught sight of Angaray coming along the wharf.

"Well?" he queried, "want her?"

"You know the Islands pretty well?" asked Angaray.

"Well, I guess I should."

"Trading?"

"Oh! cruising around; I know 'em better'n most."

"What's this treasure story?"

Barracott laughed and spat, and a tinge of color came into his sallow cheek.

"Ah! Old Jakins been loading you up? Jakins thinks me a fool, I know. Sometime maybe I'll be able to prove I'm not."

"Now, see here, Captain Barracott, let us talk straight. Tell me just as much as you care to about this matter. Perhaps something may come out of it."

Barracott chewed in silence, and, between spits, cast an occasional side glance at the other, as though sizing him up.

"Well, you've heard Jakins's story, I suppose. This is mine." He spoke slowly and looked Angaray straight in the eye, with a steady, unwavering gaze.

"I was second mate of the bark *Isobel*. Seven years ago she sailed from Sydney for Callao, with two hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold aboard, and I superintended the putting of that gold into the captain's cabin. Beside the captain and the first mate and myself, not another soul on board knew what it was. That's how I know how the gold is there. The money was being sent to work up a revolution out there. I reckon there have been seven revolutions since then, so it's anybody's money now that can find it. The *Isobel* struck a reef and stuck on it. As to the exact location of that reef, and how it is I have not yet struck it, is more difficult to explain to you."

He sat and eyed Angaray with a keen, hungry gaze, and chewed rapidly in silence. Then suddenly:

"See here, mister——"

"Angaray is my name."

"Mr. Angaray, do you mean business? If you do, I will show you what I have never yet shown to any other man."

Angaray looked into his honest, straightforward face, the keen blue eyes lit up with great hopefulness, and said quietly:

"As I have told you, I want a six months' cruise among the Islands. Your boat suits me all right. From what old Jakins says, Captain Barracott is an honest man and a good seaman, with a bee in his bonnet. If you care to trust me with some evidence of the reasons for your belief in this treasure story, and if they satisfy me, I will charter her for the voyage."

Barracott rose and went into his cabin, which opened off the deck-house. Angaray heard the rattle of keys on an iron box, and he returned in a moment with an oblong parcel, carefully wrapped up in tarpaulin.

He handled it reverently, laid it on the table in front of Angaray, and carefully opened it. Inside was a weather-worn log-book.

He turned over the pages till he came toward the end of the record.

His voice was husky, and the long brown finger with which he pointed to certain entries trembled with excitement as he said:

"This is the log of the *Isobel*. See here how it runs," and he read:

"August 1st, 1880.—Sailed from Sydney this day

with two hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold on board, consigned to Don Stefan Truxadero of Callao.'"

Then followed the names of the first and second mates, and each member of the crew.

" ' August 10th.—Latitude 35° 30', Longitude 170° W.—head winds.' "

He ran his finger down the record till he came to:

" ' September 12th.—Still dead calm, sickness aboard, four men down with fever.

" ' September 14th.—Harvey died of fever, buried to-day.

" ' September 15th.—Jones died of fever, buried to-day.'

" All that," said Barracott, " is in the handwriting of Captain Jordan." Then he continued:

" ' September 16th.—Captain died this morning; four others down sick; Barracott sick.'

" That," said Barracott, " is in the writing of William Hacker, the first mate.

" ' September 18th.—Elvin died of fever.

" ' September 20th.—Mr. Hacker died to-day; self and four others still sick with fever. Dead calm still.'

" That," said Barracott, " is in my writing."

" ' September 26th.—Since last entry six-days' hurricane; lost both masts; ran before it.

" ' September 27th.—Dead calm; dark weather; no observations possible; no idea where we are.

" ' September 30th.—Two-days' gale; no sun or stars for last four days; no observations.'

Below this was written in the same handwriting:

" ' On this night *Isobel* struck reef.' "

And there the entries ended.

"Now, sir," said Barracott hoarsely; "sometime I will tell you the end of that story. You have seen enough to know that there is groundwork for my belief in the treasure. To the best of my power I have figured out four likely spots where the *Isobel* might have struck. Three times I have tried to find her, and three times I have failed. Will you give me my fourth chance?"

His excitement was gone, he spoke calmly and rationally, and, patting the log-book with his right hand, as he stood before Angaray, he said:

"A man does not give seven years of his life to a search, unless he has a strong belief in it. Charter the *Bluewing* for a six-months' cruise, pay only the expenses,—provisions, crew, and fittings, I want nothing for myself,—and if we strike that blessed spot you and I will go shares in what we find there. Three times I have tried from this side; I would like to try once more from the other side. If we fail, you get your money's worth in the cruise you are wanting."

And Angaray answered quietly:

"I will take your offer, Captain Barracott."

Barracott grasped his hand.

"You give me a new lease of life," he said, and there was a vibrant ring in his voice which had not been there before.

"I've been rotting here for twelve months. When do you want to start?"

"As soon as you like."

"Four days from to-day suit you?"

"Can you manage it in the time? Any difficulty about the crew?"

"Difficulty? If you foot the bills I can manage

anything. As to crew, the difficulty will be to keep them off the ship. The Jacks know me, and, like all Jacks, they have full faith in hidden treasure. Four days from to-day I'll be ready. As soon as old Ericsson hears the *Bluewing* is to sail again he'll walk right in and take possession of the first starboard bunk in the fo'c's'le. He's been every voyage yet, and he's a true man, and a good seaman."

"Right," said Angaray. "Send in all the bills to me at the Palace, and be ready to start on the 10th. I will come down each day to see how you are getting on."

"You've made a new man of me, Mr. Angaray. I don't think you'll ever regret it."

CHAPTER II.

FREE.

ANGARAY sauntered down to the wharf next morning, and was amazed at the scene of bustling activity he found there.

Already casks, cases, barrels, lay scattered about promiscuously. Floats and drays came dashing up at intervals, and dumped their contents alongside the others. These were being rapidly transferred to the deck of the schooner, and more slowly stowed away in the depths of the hold and the lazarette. Barracott was all over the place at once, urging on the work with mouth and muscle, giving a word here, a shoulder there, and a hand all round, and inspired by him, the men, both sailors and stevedores, were working like giants.

He waved his hand as he caught sight of Angaray coming alongside the dock-head, and presently skipped off the boat and joined him where he stood watching, with the amused interest of a busy man off duty, the activity which his decision of the previous night had called into life.

"You're busy," said Angaray.

"I guess so: I've been at it half the night. I want to start a day earlier, if it's all the same to you," panted Barracott.

"That's all right," said Angaray, "if you can manage it all in the time."

"We'll manage it all right. You see it meant Friday, and it was a Thursday——" Before Angaray had time to smile at the seaman's superstition Barracott was off like a suddenly loosened spring, and was in among the men on deck unsnarling some tangle that had taken place and was hindering matters.

The work went on again rapidly under his vigorous supervision, and presently he was back, sitting by Angaray's side on a case of tinned meat, mopping his face, and giving a quarter of his attention to his employer, and the remainder to his men.

"Got your crew all right?" asked Angaray.

Barracott bit off a chew and nodded, while his jaws worked it into a comfortable shape.

"Got six of the best men going. Old Ericsson was here with his duds a quarter of an hour after he heard the news. That's him," he said, nodding toward an elderly seaman who was directing operations on the schooner's deck.

He was a tall man, slightly bent, his hands carried well forward, as though always seeking something to

grip. His pleasant, well-tanned face, hairless and strongly molded, and lighted by a pair of keen blue eyes, was distinctly prepossessing, and Angaray felt that, apart from Barracott's eulogium, here was a man to be relied on.

A crowd of loafers and disappointed sailors hung round the wharf, watching the preparations with envious eyes.

"Just what I told you. I could have got fifty if I'd wanted 'em." Then suddenly and energetically: "Say, what do you say to carrying some trade?"

"What's that?" said Angaray.

"Prints, hardware, gin, for the niggers. You might cover all expenses and leave a profit, apart from what we hope to find."

"How does it work out?"

"Two to three hundred per cent., if we're lucky."

"And what amount?"

"The more you take, the more you make; five thousand dollars would do."

"All right," said Angaray. "Suppose we say five thousand. Can you get the goods selected and delivered in time?"

"Trust me," said Barracott, bounding up again. "I'll see to it now."

He called Ericsson, the mate, ashore, and gave him some directions, then turned to Angaray.

"Come along, if you like, and help me do the buying. You'd better insure through old Jakins, and leave the papers with the bank"; and he led the way down the wharf, and plunged into a whirl of bargaining, with Angaray at his heels, that lasted till evening.

Midday Thursday found Angaray leaning over the stern of the *Bluewing* watching the tug, which had towed them through the Narrows and past the Heads, plow her way like a watery comet with an ever-widening trail back toward the Golden Gate.

And as the sweet salt air filled him like new wine he heaved a great sigh of relief. Now at last he felt himself free, free from the past, free from that horrible body of death to which he had been chained for so many months, and which had dragged his soul down to the gates of hell.

Brodie was dead; Ayrton was dead; all the past was dead. Let the dead past bury its dead. Requiescat!

And now for the new life. He had passed through the Golden Gate; behind it lay forever his sin and his suffering. God helping him, and the chances offering, he would do his best to wipe out the past, and atone for it as Providence might permit.

He turned his back on it all, and gazed out over the illimitable future, and wondered what it held for him, and then his eye traveled down from the snowy sheets bellying tight to the wind, to the chaotic confusion of the deck.

Barracott and his men had worked like demons, but, so insistent had the captain been on catching that day's ebb that the decks were still littered with bales and boxes, to be stowed away in the leisure of a clean straight run, with a spanking northeaster blowing well over the quarter, and every sail stretched to the full.

Old Ericsson was directing operations in the waist, and Captain Barracott was striding the deck astern, like a pair of animated compasses. He glanced aloft to see that the sails drew full, and he looked ahead,

—about six thousand miles,—but he never once looked behind. His whole being was concentrated on what lay in front, in that last great circle of sea and sky of which the lonely reef and the remains of the *Isobel* formed the center. His eyes sparkled like the blue sea below. An exultant castanet snap of finger and thumb cracked out now and again from either swinging hand, and caused the steersman to cast a suspicious glance up at his sails. There was a spring in his step, and a sense of exultation in the whole man, that warmed Angaray's heart toward him, and the reflection of it filled his own breast with a novel glow of hope and expectation.

For six months, at all events, he was a free man—free perhaps forever. Free from all the sickening fears and doubts of the past two years—free even from the worries and annoyances and cares of business life. He drew in breath after breath of the sweetest air under heaven, and every breath renewed his being.

They did not speak. Barracott's body paced the deck, but his heart was miles away. Angaray's beaten soul was finding its way back to his body, and it filled it nigh to bursting.

As he grew gradually accustomed to his surroundings, he found time to be surprised at the unexpected speed and graceful motion of the schooner. The wind was blowing strong over the quarter, and caught her fair and full for showing her very best qualities. She danced and raced over the waves, and sent their white tops cascading in silvery showers from her bows, in a way that was an absolute tonic to his weary soul, and brought color to his cheek and light to his eye.

All through that first long delicious afternoon of

absolute freedom he stood propped by his elbows against the stern railing, till the sun sank red and glorious in the west, and the wind began to blow cold, and he began to feel an unusual desire for food.

The Chinese cook summoned him at last to supper, and in the little saloon of the deck-house he found the captain awaiting him at a well-spread table, and at sight of him Barracott laughed aloud and said, in the tones of a happy schoolboy:

"Feeling good? So'm I. I've a premonition that we'll hit it this time all right."

"Hope so for your sake," said Angaray; "you deserve to hit it. I'm not much on premonitions though, even when they refer to sailing on a Friday."

Barracott laughed again.

"I was thinking more of the men than of myself. If we'd waited till to-morrow they'd have been on the quee vee for bad signs right along. We've started fair anyhow."

"Happy folk to retain a belief in signs and omens and premonitions. I don't know but what I rather envy you. The hard facts of life have left me no room for anything of the kind."

"Ah! you haven't been a sailor all your life."

"No! better for me perhaps if I had. But tell me, captain, do your premonitions ever come true?"

"Why, certainly they do. I've sailed more than once feeling failure and disaster right here," and he smote his chest, "and have felt inclined to put back before I was fifty miles clear of the Heads."

"Dyspepsia," said Angaray, "bodily, or perhaps mental."

"No dyspepsia about it, just premonition, and it always came true."

"You don't feel that way now?"

"Not by a very long way. We're going to hit it this time. I'm as certain of it as I sit here."

"This time, at all events, I hope your premonition will come true."

"My stock's away up," said Barracott, "and no premium you could offer would buy me out."

"I feel that way myself," replied Angaray, "maybe it is sympathy."

"Premonition," said the captain. And after a pause he added musingly, "I really think I care more for the finding of the money than for the money itself. I want to give the lie to old Jakins and the rest. They've labeled me 'crank' these seven years past. The greatest moment of my life will be when I can sail back through those Heads and hear it buzzing about that Jim Barracott has struck it, after all." And his deep eyes flamed and the color flushed his sallow cheek for a moment.

"Where's our first stop?" asked Angaray.

"Sydney Harbor, unless we foul something else meantime. If we could carry this breeze with us we should be there inside thirty days. But that would be too much to expect. However, there's a decent margin. If we get there by the 27th it will do. Now I must relieve Ericsson. I guess he's just about starving."

The mate occupied the seat the captain had just vacated, with a promptitude that betokened a healthy appetite. He nodded to Angaray, who was lying back in his seat enjoying a cigar with a long-forgotten

relish. From his cloud of smoke he quietly watched the old man, who was giving his undivided attention to the business in hand. When he finished, Angaray pushed his cigar-case toward him, and the mate picked out a cigar and lit up in silence.

"And what is your opinion of our prospects, Mr. Ericsson?" asked Angaray.

"Good," said the mate.

"You see no reason why we should not find what we're looking for?"

"No"; and slowly, after a three-puff pause, "not if it's still there."

"And you're satisfied in your own mind that it ever was there?"

"Yes"; and again after a pause of many puffs, "I've known Jim Barracott these twenty years . . . never found him a fool . . . best chance he's had yet . . . hope he'll strike it this time."

CHAPTER III.

ON THE WINGS OF THE WIND.

FOR six glorious days the northeaster never slackened, and scarcely shifted a point, and they swept triumphantly along on the wings of it.

Barracott was in the highest of spirits. He paced the deck joyously and snapped his castanets as though invoking to his aid the spirits of the vasty deep, and at the same time urging on his little ship to her greatest speed.

Angaray enjoyed those six days as he had never enjoyed six consecutive days in his life before. He

developed a mighty appetite, and grew strong in body and steady in nerve, and his face blistered and tanned with the sun and the salt.

Then there came two days of dead rolling calm, and then the capricious wind gods marshaled their forces against them, and smote them in the teeth, and flung them to and fro, and danced on them, so that they had to make long and arduous tacks to make any progress at all, with sails as flat as boards, and the water bubbling through the scuppers all the time, and never an inch lost that could possibly be saved, so close did Barracott keep her to the wind. And he all the time as sulky as a bear with a sore head and as unapproachable, balancing his long legs on the unstable deck and cursing the wind to its face. The while Angaray clung in torment to the sides of his plunging bunk, and wished himself dead, which indeed had been a much more comfortable state to be in. And Wan Lee, the cook, under a mistaken sense of kindness, added to his woe by constantly popping in his head to see how he was getting on. And on every such occasion the association of the smooth round yellow face with the preparation of greasy messes of food brought upon the sufferer a fresh attack of sickness, and he convulsively adjured the smiling Chinaman to leave him to die in peace. Till, having been turned thoroughly and many times inside out, his interior economy learned to adjust itself to the motion of the ship, and he was able at last to throw on some clothes and crawl out to the door of the deck-house and start life afresh.

It was a grim, gray wilderness of low, driving cloud and racing black rollers that met his sight—chaotic

sea and sky above, below, all around, and the schooner tumbling in the midst like a stray cork, a very sport of the gods. He felt smaller than he had ever felt in his life before, and his tiny brain reeled with the unwonted aspect of things. But it was better than the closer environment of his cabin; and he hung on to the doorway and drank in new life with every breath of the keen salt air. Once Barracott strode round astern with scowling face to berate the steersman for letting the schooner fall half an inch or so off the wind, into which she was boring almost head foremost. He nodded to Angaray and then resumed his stand in front of the deck-house, and gloomed at the weather.

Next day the wind slackened, died away, and by night they were rolling again in dead calm.

Four whole days that spell of calm continued. It restored to Angaray his equilibrium and his equanimity, his appetite, and some color to his face, and but for one thing he would have enjoyed himself thoroughly.

The disturbing element was the behavior of Barracott. He tramped the deck in frowning silence, with heavy tread and no spring in his walk, ate his meals in gloomy abstraction, and was as unsociable and bearish as he had been during the preceding days of adverse winds. Angaray could not make him out, and his efforts at pumping him were ineffectual.

But on the fifth morning, being their sixteenth day out, when Angaray reached the deck he found the schooner flying along, with every stitch of canvas set, before a strong northeaster again; and the spring had come back to the captain's step and the light had come back to his eye, and he greeted his passenger gayly;

but withal, there was just a trace of the recent anxiety in his face, though none in his tones or his talk.

"Now we're all right, Mr. Angaray," he said. "If we can only keep this up we shall do it all right. I hate being kept back, and my margin was getting eaten away by those cursed head winds and calms."

Angaray did not comprehend him, but it did not seem worth while to discuss the matter. He understood only that the captain's whole soul was bent on his quest, and that any delays chafed and worried him.

The northeaster increased in force till it blew half a gale, with every appearance of more behind it.

An ordinary trader, anxious even to make up for lost time, would have furled his topsails and treble-reefed everything else; a careful one would have snugged all down for dirty weather; but Captain Baracott carried on without touching a rope.

The masts creaked and strained, but they were two tall pines from Oregon, and they stood it bravely. The ropes hummed like fiddle-strings, and the sails thrashed at their bolt ropes till it seemed impossible but that the next violent gust must carry them away altogether. The schooner's nose bored deep into the backs of the racing rollers, and gashed them like the share of a mighty plow, so that great cascades of bubble-laced green came sluicing in over the bows, and raced furiously along the decks, and died away amidships.

The men pursed their lips into soundless whistles, and kept one anxious eye on the skipper and one on the sticks aloft, as men who looked momentarily for a giving way on the part of one or other, or both. And they looked at one another, now and again, as

who would say, "What has got the old man, and why this unholy haste? Are we running on a time charter, or did we sign for a six months' cruise among the Islands?" And for all his loyalty to the captain, old Ericsson himself could not entirely hide his anxiety.

To Angaray's untutored eye there was nothing out of the common in the reckless speed at which the *Blue-wing* was churning through the waves. It was rather exhilarating than otherwise. But he could not be long on deck without noticing the anxious glances aloft of the mate and crew, and these gradually imparted to him a sense of insecurity which was magnified by his total lack of knowledge.

He took an opportunity of questioning the mate as he passed.

"What's the matter, Ericsson?"

"Nothing"; and the old man passed on.

Then he tried the man at the wheel, a Scotchman named MacVittie, with whom he had had a chat now and again. Angaray caught his eye as it came down from a quick, anxious run over the top spars.

"What's wrong, MacVittie?"

MacVittie chewed phlegmatically, and then said:

"Oh, naeth'n, so long's the sticks stand."

And then the landsman's eyes opened to the fact that the ship was being driven beyond her wont, and the unusual fishing-rod aspect of those tapering upper spars made a deep impression on him. At dinner he questioned Barracott.

"You're driving her, captain."

"Aye, aye!" said Barracott, "we must get on. We lost so much time doddering around in yon calm. Now we've got to make up for it."

“No fear of coming to grief? More haste less speed, you know!”

“We’ve got to risk it. We’ve got to make it up.”

“But what’s the hurry, captain? We’ve got the best part of six months for the cruise.”

“Aye, aye,” and he fell to musing.

He glanced up tentatively two or three times at Angaray, as though not quite sure in his own mind whether to say more or not. Then, at last, after a long silence:

“Do you remember the *Isobel’s* log I showed you?”

“Yes, I remember it.”

“Remember the dates?”

“No, I didn’t pay so much attention to the dates as to the facts.”

Barracott rose and went into his cabin, and came back in a moment with the log-book in its tarpaulin cover.

He opened it out on the table in front of Angaray, and turned over the leaves, and at last pointed with long brown finger to:

“August 1st, 1880.—Sailed from Sydney this day, etc.”

“Yes?” said Angaray, wondering.

“We’re going to do the same. Sailed from Sydney, August 1st. We’ll take every chance, and, by God, Mr. Angaray, I’ll find that reef if it’s still above water!”

“I see. But is there no danger of other reefs, hereabouts? I thought these parts were troublesome that way.”

Baracott hauled down a chart and unrolled it.

“Here’s where we are just now,” he said, pointing

to the last mark in the lengthening chain which started out from San Francisco. "It's fairly clear here, but when we get down here among the islands it's the very devil." The long brown finger pointed to spots on the map which fairly bristled with reefs and tiny islets and notes of interrogation. It looked horribly dangerous to Angaray. "But we've got to take our chance. We've got over four thousand miles to do, and this is the 1st of July. We may have calms again and head winds—bound to have 'em. You see what a close shave it 'll be. But I intend to sail out of Sydney Harbor on the 1st of August at six in the morning, if we only get in at five."

His eyes were burning with a deep glow which Angaray had never seen in them before, and which caused him a slight feeling of discomfort.

"And suppose we struck a hidden reef while we're going ahead like this?"

"We'd all be at the bottom inside of five minutes. They stand up, some of them, as straight as the side of a house, and as sharp on top as the teeth of a saw. Our bottom would go like a sheet of paper."

"Heaven and earth, captain! go slow! I'll charter her for another three months sooner than go to the bottom in five minutes."

"We haven't time to go slow. I've a premonition that if we sail out of Sydney Harbor at six o'clock in the morning on August the 1st we will find the *Isobel*, and I'm going to try."

He bit off another chew and went on deck, leaving Angaray in anything but a comfortable frame of mind. So uncomfortable was he, indeed, that he could not bring himself to discuss the matter with the mate lest

his discomfort should make itself visible. So he smoked in a somber silence which the other never broke.

His sleep that night was broken by nightmare dreams in which, with a terrific crash, the ship parted in twain and he found himself sinking, sinking, sinking into unfathomable depths and never reaching bottom. It was a relief to wake with a start to find the schooner still on top of the water, though still thrashing along at full speed, heedless of consequences.

But the days passed. The northeaster held out splendidly. No disaster happened, and gradually the high spirits into which the recovery of his lost margin put the skipper began to project themselves into Angaray also.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY OF THE "ISOBEL."

It was on the fifth night of their triumphant run on the wings of the northeaster, as they sat in the tiny saloon of the deck-house, having a final smoke and chew before turning in, that Angaray, taking advantage of the captain's overflowing spirits—for at times he had been absolutely unapproachable, and they had not passed a dozen words a day—reminded him of his promise to complete some day the story of the loss of the *Isobel*.

"Aye, aye!" said Barracott reflectively. "Well, you have a right to it, no man better. Well, the reason why I have not so far been able to locate the exact spot where the reef lies was because I had been able to take no observations for several days in conse-

which
clear
slands
ranted
reefs
oked
t to
iles
ms
ee
of
e

quence of thick weather—no sun, no stars. Besides that I was very sick of the fever, and it was only the deaths of Captain Jordan and Mr. Hacker, the first mate, that dragged me out of my bunk, where I ought by rights to have stopped.

“The men were getting out of hand, which was not to be wondered at. There’s nothing like a long calm for upsetting discipline; and when, besides, the fever was taking us off one after another, and two of the officers had already gone, what else could you expect?”

“After over five weeks of absolute dead sweltering calm—my God! it was hell itself, and the ship thick with the fever—a hurricane struck us in the night, snapped the masts like carrots, and drove us any which way. The men had sense to cut clear the raffle and keep her before the gale. I was too sick to lift my head, and as weak as a kitten. Not that I could have done anything if I could have got about. There was nothing to be done but let her drive. But the howling of the wind that was taking us out of hell did me good and acted like a tonic.

“Six days we drifted, and then it fell calm again. Then on the second night the gale caught us once more, and then there came a crash, and I was flung out of my bunk, and where I fell there I lay, too weak to get up and not much caring to. How long I lay I do not know. I was completely off my head. But when I did come to at last—I reckon now it must have been a couple of days I lay there—my head was clear and the fever was gone, but I could hardly lift a finger. My tongue was shriveled and dried up, and my throat felt like a lime-kiln. I crawled on deck inch by inch to the water butt, and drank and lay down by it, then

drank more and lay down again, and bit by bit strength came back to me. The air was delicious, and after a bit I crawled to the galley, and got some bits of food.

"The men had evidently quitted the ship. One of our boats had gone in the gale and they had taken the other. When I could look about me, I found the ship hard and fast on a reef, and behind the reef was a little volcanic island shaped like a horseshoe. The inside of the shoe was a lagoon, and the reef on which the *Isobel* lay ran across the opening.

"On the sloping white beach I could see the men lying fast asleep. I hailed, but it only sounded like the mewling of a cat, and none of them stirred. So I lay down again and waited. I waited till the sun got high, and till it got low, and never a man of them had moved a finger so far as I could see. They were worn out, no doubt, with the trying work of the gales. They would be all the better for their long rest.

"I got more food and ate it with relish. Then I lay down again, and slept till morning and felt better.

"The men lay just as they were the day before, all six of them. I could not tell who was who, because some of them lay all bundled up in uncouth attitudes, just as they had tumbled out of the boat, which, however, some of them had had the sense to run up the beach.

"As the day wore on and never a limb among them moved, I began to get startled, and then I got frightened. I lay and watched them all day, and ate and drank and got more strength every hour. And next morning, knowing by this time they were all dead, I could stand it no longer; I slipped off most of my

things and dropped over the side into the water, not knowing what the effect of it might be in my weak state. But I never remember anything more delicious. I can feel it yet. It braced me up, and I swam and scrambled ashore.

“They were all dead as I expected, and one of the gold cases lay open on the beach. They had got to fighting with their knives, and two of them had got the captain’s and mate’s revolvers out of their cabins.

“It was an awful sight. I sickened and lay down among them. I was still very weak, and I remember crying like a baby at the horror and lonesomeness of it all. It wouldn’t have been half so lonesome if those dead bodies had not been there. At last I crawled down to the sea again, and managed to get the boat afloat, and tumbled into her, and sculled slowly back to the ship, and climbed aboard and lay down as ready to die as to live.

“The fever had quite left me, and I grew stronger every hour, but it was three more days before I could make up my mind to go ashore again. Then I braced up to it. It took me pretty near the whole day to get rid of the bodies. Burying them was out of the question. I dragged them by the heels over the back of the island, and launched them into the open sea on the other side. I did it as decently as I could, though they had little enough claim for any consideration; but it was horrible work. Then the place felt cleaner, and I set to work to do what I had thought out during the last few days. I got out all the gold and hid it in certain places I picked out on the island; all but a belt full which I stowed round my waist. I knew I might fall into queer company before I got through, and if

I had to carry too much, I was as like as not to lose both my life and the gold: so I took what I could carry, and no more. It took me three days to break it out and stow it away again, but I got it done at last. Then my whole thought was to get away as quick as possible. I fitted the boat as well as I could, stocked her with provisions and water, and two days later, loosed from the reef and ran due east. It was fourteen days before I was picked up by a Chili trader, who carried me to Valparaiso.

"Three times I've tried to find the island, and three times I've failed. This time I intend to get there.

"Now, Mr. Angaray, that is God's truth as far I know it, and you're the first I've ever told the whole story to. We're partners in the venture, and you've a right to know what I can tell you." He paused, and then resumed,—“There's one question you'd ask at once if you were a seaman. Why didn't I take proper observations on the island and locate it to a mile? But the reason was very simple. Those fools had got at the drink in the captain's cabin, and had made hay there. Everything was smashed: chronometer, sextant, and everything else. It was in smashing around that they came on the gold. I cursed them high and low, but that did no good, and I did my best to construct a sextant and take an observation; but the figures were evidently wrong. It has cost me seven years of my life, but this time we shall hit it.”

"One other question," said Angaray, "you don't expect to find the wreck there still, I suppose?"

"No, she will have gone to pieces long ago. But the chances are that the gold is still there where I stowed it, and there we'll find it."

He had told his story in terse, homely language. Angaray believed every word of it, and it made a deep impression on him. As Barracott spoke he could see the horse-shoe curve of white beach, and the six dead seamen lying on the slope of it. He could see the live man dragging the dead by the heels over the ridge of the little hill, and casting them into the sea on the other side, pausing as he came back to look anxiously round the horizon and at the wreck on the reef, and then going slowly down the hill for another corpse. These things printed themselves indelibly on his brain, at leisure now for the first time for so many years from its own concerns. He pondered them in the night watches, and through the long, wonderful days—which to another might have been monotonous, but for this man were filled with the novel charm of freedom—until it almost seemed to him that he had lived through them himself.

It was just as well he heard the story then, for after one more day of their headlong race before the friendly northeaster, they turned their prow straight for Sydney, and from that hour their troubles began anew.

Head winds beset them, baffling calms paralyzed them, just as Barracott had foreseen. He congratulated himself on the margin he had piled up by taking full advantage of the northeaster, and justified the reckless fool-hardiness which it had entailed. Then, as his margin and his spirits ran down together, the spring left his step again, and the self-gratulatory snap of finger and thumb were no longer heard. He kept the deck day and night in windy weather, filching every inch of way by every cunning art he was master

of, and took to his bunk in the calms—a very incarnation of dogged determination and sulky obstinacy.

And now they were threading their way, whenever the ship had any way on her at all, among those islands and reefs that made the chart look like the intricate design for a delicate and complex piece of needlework, and that made Angaray's hair bristle in his bunk at nights at thought of the dangers that beset them. He came at last to follow the captain's plan, and while they were tacking to and fro, as close into the teeth of contrary gales as nature and the art of man would permit them, he kept the deck with eyes and ears straining for the first sign of danger, and every man on board did the same. No need to order a bright lookout to be kept. Every man Jack of them, down even to Wan Lee, knew that their safety was purely a matter of good luck, or Providence, or whatever they cared to call it, and every man went with his ears prepared for the warning roar of breakers ahead, or the closer, final, fatal crunch of the coral teeth in the skin of the ship.

But they passed scathless through all dangers, and gave a wide berth to all the sunny isles whose very names conveyed to Angaray a sense of lotus-eating calm, and freedom from all the responsibilities of life.

In the dim distance of the far horizon he saw them pass, cloud-like piles of snowy rock, and could see, or imagine, the feathery fringes of verdure which decked, without concealing, their loveliness, even as, he was told, the scanty apparel of the dusky maidens who dwelt among them enhanced, without too much concealing, the charms of the wearers.

CHAPTER V.

THE BEE BEGINS TO HUM.

So, through storm and stress, and the more irritating obstructiveness of long, sweltering calms, they raised at last the Australian coast, and on the 31st day of July they sailed up Sydney Harbor.

It was a close shave, but they had done it, and Barracott's exuberance of delight at this successful commencement of operations showed itself in a kind of St.-Vitus's-dance-impossibility-to-remain-quiet.

He paced the deck as though his long legs were fitted with steel springs, his arms swung, his fingers and thumbs clicked and snapped, and eye and cheek burned with hidden fires.

He would not land, nor would he permit any of the men to go ashore, but sent off Ericsson and Wan Lee in the small boat to procure a supply of fresh provisions, and Angaray elected to go with them. As they pulled off the captain informed them that the *Blue-wing* would up anchor at six in the morning, and that if by any mischance they had not turned up he would sail without them.

However, there was no mischance. Angaray enjoyed his stroll on solid, unrolling earth once more, though he found it strangely uneven to his feet. Ericsson and Wan Lee did their marketing, and under the stars they pulled the laden boat slowly back to the schooner.

Barracott never left the deck that night, and his ceaseless tramp beat itself into the thread of Angaray's

dreams. On the stroke of six next morning the anchor was hove up, and so began surely as strange a voyage as ever mind of man conceived.

They were bound nominally for Callao, on the seven-year-old track of the *Isobel*, and their course lay almost due east, with a slant toward the north to weather the projecting point of New Zealand. The wind was favorable, the weather opalescent, and they sped gallantly along, all hearts beating high with the knowledge that now they were in very truth warm on the scent, and every forward plunge brought them nearer to the end—whatever the end might be.

Even Wan Lee's slumbering soul waked up occasionally, and sparkled spasmodically through its narrow window-slits.

When Barracott took his observations the second day, he ordered a slight change in the ship's course, and each day thereafter the same thing occurred. The wind freshened, the schooner swept merrily along, but to the surprise of the men, the captain clipped her wings, and reduced her speed to that of a heavily-laden trader.

On the third day, and again on the fourth, after taking his observations he suddenly hove the ship to, and for a couple of hours she lay, head to wind, with sails shivering and slatting, and all apparently without rhyme or reason. Then he put her on her course again with furled topsails and a reef in main and foresails, and they jogged slowly along toward the east.

Barracott's spirits were altogether beyond the control of his will, or the limitations of his body. A stranger would have said he was intoxicated, and so

in truth he was, but with no mortal drink. The whole nature of the man was bubbling and seething with the excitement of anticipated success. The hopes, and fears, and efforts of the best years of his life were culminating to a fine point, and that point lay just a few weeks ahead of his bowsprit.

The men were puzzled, and many a carping and unflattering comment on "the old man's" behavior was bandied to and fro, in grunts and growls, as they sat in the bows of an evening with their pipes and quids.

"Why in gehenna did he want to bring her down through the Islands at that devil's pace if there was no need for it? Seemed in a demon of a hurry then, when hurry meant a one-to-ten chance of getting through alive. Now, when it's all plain sailing, and all the wind he wants, he makes her drag. What's he want to turn her round for each day and dodder about doin' nothing? Reckon he's goin' dotty."

But when old Ericsson chanced occasionally on such remarks he would say, quietly, "Stow it, you fools! Captain Barracott knows what he's about. You just wait and keep your silly tongues quiet." But the mate himself was puzzled, though he put on a bold front and did not show it.

Angaray alone possessed the clew to the situation which the captain himself had given him. He watched matters at first with amused interest. Then a slight feeling of doubt, which developed by degrees into distinct uneasiness as to ultimate consequences, took possession of him.

He saw from the captain's action that, in informing him of his intention to sail from Sydney at the

exact minute of the very day on which the *Isobel* had sailed seven years before, he had disclosed only half the truth.

He was, as nearly as he possibly could, carrying the *Bluewing*, day by day, over exactly the same course as the ill-fated *Isobel* had taken. This explained his constant consultation of the old log-book and the chart he had marked up from it; it explained the constant slight alterations of the ship's course each day at noon, the tardy traveling when they might have covered the space in half the time, the frequent apparently capricious total stoppages in their halting progression.

He was, in fact, endeavoring to work out an exact sequence of the voyage of the *Isobel*.

The idea was whimsical enough, but it struck Angaray as not over practical, and furthermore, with the half-remembered entries in the old log-book in his mind, as likely to lead to curious times ahead if the captain expected the sequence to work out in full.

Barracott, however, was more than satisfied with the progress of events. He never seemed to require any sleep, and what time he was not snatching a hasty meal in the cabin, or poring over charts and log-books and scraps of paper covered with figures, his exuberant spirits were effervescing on deck in spirited finger-snaps and ceaseless trampings to and fro. If his temper had been uncertain at times before when things went wrong, he was quite as unsociable now from sheer preoccupation. His mind was so full of the matter in hand that the smaller courtesies of life—on which in the narrow confines of shipboard so much

depends—entirely escaped him. Days passed, and he and Angaray exchanged barely a dozen sentences. In a word, the man was on fire, and his one consuming thought filled him entirely, to the exclusion of all else.

It was somewhat of a surprise, therefore, to Angaray when one night at supper—it was their ninth night out from Sydney—Barracott came in from the deck and seated himself at the table.

Of late they had frequently not met at meals, not even at that most sociable meal of the day, for Barracott would snatch a bite at any time, and at times he seemed never to quit the deck, night or day.

As he seated himself it seemed to Angaray that a touch of anxiety had cast a restraint upon the riotous flow of his spirits, and he wondered what was the matter. The ship had been hove-to as usual that day for a couple of hours, and had since been jogging quietly along on her course, and all seemed well.

“I’m acting like a bear at present, Mr. Angaray, I know, and you must just put up with me. You never knew, I guess, what it was to be nearing the end of a seven years’ run,” said the captain.

“That’s all right,” said Angaray, “don’t trouble about me. How are we getting on?”

“So far, first-rate,” said Barracott. “Every day at noon has seen us within a couple of miles of the exact spot where the *Isobel* passed seven years ago to a minute. To-morrow,” and he cast at Angaray a look that was at once deprecating and full of defiant assertion, “the weather should change and we should have head winds.”

“And if the head winds don’t come?”

"But they will," said Barracott, "so there's no good talking about it."

"But, man alive," said Angaray, "do you really, in calm and sober earnest, expect things to work out exactly as they did seven years ago?"

"We shall see," said Barracott, and he drummed nervously on the table with his long brown fingers.

To Angaray, such an expectation seemed nigh to craziness. He was doubtful, however, how far it would be wise to venture in combating it.

"But, Captain Barracott," he said after a pause, as he lit a cigar, "if your idea should work out correctly, where does it lead us to?"

"To the reef—and the gold;" and the smoldering fire in his eyes blazed up furiously for a second.

"And, meanwhile, what about the fever and the deaths? If I remember the *Isobel's* log aright, the captain was one of the first to die;" and he looked keenly at Barracott through the smoke.

"Aye, aye, that was so, but in this case the captain doesn't intend to die. There we must try and break the sequence." His eyes were fixed gloomily on his fingers which still drummed nervously on the wooden table.

A silence fell between them, until Angaray broke it by asking:

"And suppose, after all, your sequence won't work out, and we don't find the reef!"

"It 'll be a bad day for me when I've made up my mind to that," said Barracott. "The reef is there, and the gold is there, and I don't intend to leave these seas until I find 'em."

"Oh, pshaw! We all have our disappointments.

The reef may have sunk or been burst up. You said it was volcanic. I would not make it a life and death job if I were you."

"A bad day for me," repeated Barracott heavily, "and I would not want to see the end of it."

Then he got up and went on deck again, leaving Angaray in no very comfortable frame of mind. It struck him that old Jakins had not been very far wrong in his estimate of Barracott, and that the bee in his bonnet was humming vigorously; for it seemed to him that their chances of striking the reef were of the smallest, and that the possibilities of working out the sequence of the *Isobel's* log, on which the captain was evidently building so much, were absolutely nil.

Next morning, when he reached the deck, he found the schooner close-hauled, beating up to windward in the teeth of a strong half-gale from the east, and Barracott's spirits were exuberantly high.

"Told you so," he shouted to Angaray, as soon as he set eyes on him; "we're all right. I was afraid last night things might not work out straight, but you see, it's nipped right round as right as a trivet."

Angaray nodded and hung on to the stern railings.

It certainly was curious that this change of wind should have come just at that identical time, and it was bound to confirm the captain in his whimsical hopes and ideas.

All that day, and all the next, the head winds faced them, and, contrasting the captain's gleeful satisfaction with the reckless exasperation which similar weather had induced in him on the voyage to Sydney, the crew were more puzzled than ever. About midnight on the eleventh night out the gale gradually

slackened. It fell to a breeze. At breakfast they were motionless, save for the rolling and pitching of the long green seas. At noon Barracott took his observations and worked out his calculations with feverish anxiety, and saluted the result with a triumphant clap of the big brown hands and a chuckle of delight.

"That's all right," he said to Angaray, who was watching him anxiously. "Now, I'm tired, and I'm going to turn in for a long sleep. I've hardly been in my bunk since we left Sydney. You won't want me again for about a month, except as doctor," and he laughed at Angaray's anxious face. "The medicine chest's in there," indicating one of the lockers with his foot, "in case you want it before I've had my sleep out."

The man's implicit faith in his crazy idea was almost too much for Angaray. The captain passed into his own cabin and closed the door.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WORKING OF THE SEQUENCE.

DEAD calm—sea like oil—sky flawless sapphire—sun white-hot and pitiless—pitch bubbling in the seams—railings too hot to touch with the hand—deck, in spite of constant sluicings, too hot for naked foot to tread upon—crew loafing and lying about black with disgust—Captain Barracott rarely visible, but when visible, in a state of exuberant satisfaction—Angaray amazed and troubled beyond words—Wan Lee alone of all the company placidly performing his daily duties without turning a hair or showing a wrinkle.

That was the state of matters on board the *Blue-wing* on August 22d,—twenty-two days out from Sydney, and the tenth day of the calm,—and Angaray had begun to fear that it was his own brain that was weakening, and that Barracott was the sane man after all.

When they passed into that circle of dead calm, ten days before, the captain had shut himself up in his cabin, saying to Angaray, with a triumphant laugh, that he was going to sleep for a month to make up for lost time, and they had seen scarcely anything of him since.

When Angaray turned out of his improvised bunk in the deck-house next morning at four o'clock, he leaned his arms on the sides of the open door and found the schooner's deck deserted. The atmosphere of his cabin had become so smothering that he had got Wan Lee to sling him a hammock in the saloon.

He stood for a moment gazing sleepily out toward the east, where the first faint radiant flushings of the dawn were penciling with crimson and gold the shadowy lines of the horizon. In a few hours the pitiless sun, of which these soft tones were the forerunners, would be beating down upon them with the blistering heat of a blast furnace, scorching the strength out of them, withering the hearts of them, and leaving them an easy prey for any evil thing that might follow. He wished it could always remain dawn. But time was getting on, and he stepped out on to the deck in his thin cotton sleeping suit.

He cast a sailorly look all round the widening circle of the horizon, and wondered who was to blame that no lookout was being kept. It was not much to be wondered at if discipline got lax, he thought to him-

self. They had not moved a mile in the last ten days, and there was nothing, in glass or sky, to warrant any hope of approaching change. Day had followed day, each an exact counterpart of its predecessor. Ghastly heat and nothing to do but eat and smoke, and loaf and growl—sickening work, unless, like the captain, you were buoyed up with the belief that it had to be, and that it was all a necessary part of the game he was playing, and that everything was making correctly and directly toward the end he had in view.

He seized a slung bucket and went to the side, and stood for a moment poising it in his hand before shattering the smooth mirror below. How he would have liked to plunge in head foremost and swim away and away. But there were objections, and as he dropped the bucket into the still, dark water, half a dozen of them appeared suddenly from nowhere, and came skimming silently along like stealthy black-finned ghosts, before the bucket was halfway up to the deck.

Angaray smiled as he looked at them almost butting one another as they swept up in their eagerness, and then sheering gracefully away with their hands in their pockets, so to speak, and an abstracted whistle on their lips to conceal their disappointment. It carried him back to London and the Lane, and the manners and customs of pushing young brokers there, when an unusually eligible customer turned up and they all wanted a bite at him. He could just imagine those other sharks down below saying, "Hello, old man, what's doing to-day? Thought I heard something fall just now. Seen anything in the nature of a dead body or so floating about? No? Well—so

long! business beastly slow just now, isn't it?" And he could almost hear the reply of one old shark whose wicked eye leered balefully up and caught his—"It's that fool in pink, pouring water over his head again. He does it every morning. There's no juice in the thing he throws over. I tried it one morning, but it's no good. If he'd just come down himself for a swim, it would be very much pleasanter for all concerned."

Then, having slipped off his things and poured the water over his head, Angaray let down the empty bucket on the old shark's fin, and with a whisk and a flurry they all disappeared.

He had just finished the sixth bucketful when old Ericsson climbed out of the forecastle. He took a few steps along the deck, and then stopped to say another word to those behind. Then he came slowly along to Angaray, and his face showed something wrong.

"Mr. Angaray," he said, in his low, even voice, "two of the men down there are sick, and unless I'm mistaken, it's the fever they've got."

"Good God!" said Angaray, startled into sudden recollection of the *Isobel's* log-book—"that cursed sequence!"

The mate had no idea what he meant, but he said quietly, "We must let the captain know at once," and he moved on toward the cabin, and Angaray jumped into his things and followed him.

They hammered on the captain's door till he flung it open. He stood there, clad like Angaray, in thin cottons, with his hairy neck and chest bare. He had a book in his hand and had evidently been lying in his bunk reading. The floor was strewn with other books in cheap paper backs.

"Fever aboard?" he asked eagerly, before either of the others could get out a word.

"Two of the men are sick," said Angaray, "and Ericsson thinks it is fever. The sooner you tackle it the better, captain, or that cursed sequence of yours may go further than you intend."

"I'll see to it," said Barracott, and flung his book into the bunk. And then to Angaray, with a triumphant ring in his voice—"Didn't I tell you so? It's working out to a T!"

"Well, you'd better stop it before it goes too far."

"Aye, aye!" said Barracott, "I'm all ready for it."

He set to work with a will—got out medicine chest and book, got up spare sails and booms, and rigged up a canvas hospital on deck forward, and had the sick men comfortably settled there inside a couple of hours. He dosed the two, and he dosed all the rest of the crew, including himself and Angaray and Wan Lee.

He arranged sleeping-quarters on deck for the other men, and had the canvas sides and top of the hospital sluiced constantly with water, so that the atmosphere inside was kept somewhat lower than that of a blast furnace.

He sunk a spare sail overboard with the corners hitched up with ropes, and made everyone on board bathe at least twice a day, and as much oftener as they chose.

He had a great scene with Wan Lee, who doggedly refused to disrobe and bathe himself, and, after threatening to fling him overboard among the sharks, it was only by throwing him bodily into the bath, clothes and all, that the captain at last persuaded the Chinaman to obey orders.

He ordered out the boat, and made the men tow the schooner a mile or so each day—"just to get a change of air," as he said.

Angaray insisted on assuming the post of nurse in the sick bay. Barracott assured him there was no need for him to run the risk of infection for the sake of a couple of sick Jacks, but Angaray persisted, and the captain let him have his way, washing his hands of the consequences, however.

"At your own risk, mind," he said; "it's against my ideas, and if you fall sick you'll have only yourself to blame."

The thirty days of that dreadful calm seemed like an eternity, and during the whole time the *Bluewing* never moved a yard except under the inducement of the tow-rope, which dragged them from sphere to sphere of festering heat, but over each hung the same blue dome, from which the same pitiless sun beat down.

On the twentieth day the mate sickened and came under Angaray's care. He had been in and out of the hospital regardless of danger, and at last he broke down, and Angaray, whose health seemed in no way to suffer from his arduous duties, devoted himself to the rescue of his old friend from the hot fangs of the fever-fiend.

The other two patients hung on, rallying now and again and filling their attendant with hope, then falling back and losing more than they had won, and so by degrees growing weaker and weaker.

Barracott's spirits kept up high above par. They were indeed, under the circumstances, exasperatingly high, and that without any forcing on his part. In-

deed, he found it difficult at times to restrain himself from laughing out loud with satisfaction at the astonishing way in which his hoped-for sequence was working out.

Thanks to his preventive measures, too, the other men kept their health, though they were all baked thin and brown, and their movements were slow and languorous.

And so at last the full tale of thirty days of dead rotting calm was completed, and on the very last day Angaray had the pain of losing one of the patients for whom he had wrought so faithfully.

It was MacVittie, the Scotchman. He had borne up bravely through all the ebbs and flows of the fever, but the poison had sapped his life, and he could hang on no longer. On the evening of the thirtieth day he slacked his grip and slipped quietly away.

They buried him at once, and a wild flurry of shark-fins was the horrible "Amen" to his burial service.

Of their own accord the others got into the boat and towed the schooner a mile away from his ghastly place of sepulture. But the sharks followed close behind, and circled ship and boat like a guard of honor.

Next day the other seaman died, his end hastened no doubt by the death of his mate, and him too they buried hurriedly and with averted faces, but they could not close their ears to the hideous sounds of his requiem.

They towed the schooner another mile; and the sharks swept and darted round and round, and cast devils' eyes at them; and so hungry were they for more that one monster made a leap at the boat, and

the men beat at him wildly with their oars, and then scrambled hastily aboard the schooner, and swore with many oaths that they would tow no more.

And Angaray, sad and sick at the uselessness of his patient endeavor, devoted himself body and soul to the salvation of the old Norseman.

Barracott, with one eye on the old log-book and one on the barometer, which showed no signs of falling, and with the bee buzzing furiously in his bonnet, prepared for the next step in their progress toward the end.

In that dead, festering calm which seemed like to last forever, he suddenly ordered every sail to be furled, sent down his topmasts, ordered the mate's sick bed to be made up in the deck-house, pulled down the sick bay and the men's improvised quarters on deck, and sent them to sleep in the fo'c's'le, and made all safe and snug for dirty weather.

The men growled and marveled. And Angaray fought the fever fiend hour by hour, and prayed, with no sense of blasphemy, that the change might come and his patient be saved.

And on the fourth night, just about midnight, there being no moon, there came a flash from the heavens that seemed to rive them asunder, and the deafening crash that followed went rolling and bellowing down the horizon till it seemed as though the sound would never die.

And among the last echoing reverberations Barracott's powerful voice was heard, like a reedy pipe:

"Tumble up, men, for your lives! Batten down that fo'c's'le hatch! Bolt those doors! Ready there with

axes. Now hang on by your teeth and toenails. It's coming!"—his voice rose to a triumphant shriek—"By God, it's coming—to the very minute!"

A space of dreadful silence had followed the last echoes of the thunderclap, and the men with pale faces and shortened breath had sprung to the captain's bidding, as soon as their hearts settled down out of their throats.

Then, on the tail of the captain's last hysterical yell, they heard a roar astern—and then in a moment—around—above—below them—the pent-up elemental energy of those four dead weeks was churning heaven and earth and sea and sky into chaos, and all hell seemed loosed upon them.

Barracott hung on to the wheel yelling exultant incoherencies, the mad white seas behind pounding furiously into him, and trying their best to wrest him from his hold. The men clung for life to the nearest solid thing that came to their grip, and Angaray, bolted into the cabin with his patient like rats in a trap, thanked God that the change had come, and brought with it a chance of life to the fevered man, or a quick passing to them all.

The schooner heeled over before that fury blast—down, down, down she went, till the water was bubbling up in jets through the scuppers, and the masts seemed like to lie flat upon the waves.

Could she ever bring them up again? The men held their breaths and swallowed their hearts convulsively.

Angaray, in the cabin, set his back against the bunk in which old Ericsson lay, and spread wide his arms to keep him in it, and set his feet against the table, and

found himself standing straight upright, so far had the vessel gone over.

But Barracott, yelling like a storm-fiend, was tugging at the wheel till the veins in his arms and neck stood ridged like ropes, and everything he looked at turned red. And, bit by bit, she came shuddering up again, and the stout Oregon pines stood the strain, and with a final shiver and an angry shake the *Blue-wing* swept gallantly along before the hurricane. And the men, clinging like cats, swallowed their hearts and swore grateful, blasphemous oaths.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW CAN THESE THINGS BE?

FOR six days they ran a life and death race with the roaring green mountains, which now flung them up to heaven, and now walled them round and towered high above them, and threatened each moment to whelm them down into the depths.

Angaray thought he had seen rough weather on the voyage out, but his wildest imagining had never pictured anything equal to this, and when at times he came on deck to clear his lungs and brain, he caught himself convulsively clutching the nearest part of the ship that came to hand, and endeavoring by main force to drag her bodily out of the sweltering abyss into which she seemed settling down forever.

His patient began to pick up the moment the storm burst upon them. The keen salt air proved a very breath of life to them all. It swept away the fever-

germs and the taint of the festering calm. It sent the sluggish blood coursing through their veins. It whipped their faces raw and red, and brightened their eyes with the fires of hope and endeavor.

There was not a dry corner to be found in the ship. They were soaked and soddened, for the green seas came cascading in over the stern, and went out over the bows, and raced on ahead to burst in thunder on the reefs a thousand miles away; and they wallowed along in a squatter of foam on the backs of them, careless of everything except the ship's broaching to, and rejoicing in the rush and fight of the storm as much as they had loathed and sickened at the dead rottenness of the calm.

They all developed appetites of wolves, and devoured hard tack and cold scraps with a relish that had been long absent, and so had all the charm of novelty. For six days the galley-fire was never lighted, no warm thing passed their lips, and they never grumbled. Wan Lee alone lay like a bundle of dirty clothes in a corner of his cold galley, an abject specimen of Celestial misery, with no smallest hope of ever setting eyes on Chinatown again.

And Barracott! The captain almost lived at the jumping wheel, the post of honor and of danger, and day and night, with tight-clenched jaw and straining muscles, he turned his back on death and fought for their lives like a hero, and the lives of all of them hung to the grip of his bloodless fingers on the slippery, jerking spokes.

And so, like a tiny atom tumbling and tossing amid universal chaos, the *Bluewing* went plunging down the parallels toward her appointed end, and all the winds

of heaven could not blow the bee out of her captain's bonnet.

Angaray watched Barracott anxiously. The mate, comfortably housed in Angaray's own bunk, was gaining strength every day, and no longer needed his constant attention, but he was fearful of a breakdown on the part of the captain. For the strain upon him was terrible, and yet, except for briefest intervals of absolutely necessary rest, he would not delegate his post to anyone else. And when at such times he did tumble into the deck-house and lie prone where he fell, he was up on his feet and back at the wheel if the ship's head fell off by so much as half a point, so keenly alive was he to the peril of their situation.

No man, however strong, or however much inflamed with the fire of a half-crazy delusion, could stand such a strain long, and the captain was beginning to show very visible signs of wear and tear. Something was bound to give way, and fortunately it was the storm that broke. About midday on the sixth day the gale blew itself out, and left a steady breeze, but still a very heavy sea on, and the clouds scouring low above it.

The motion of the ship became so insufferable that the captain, in fear for his masts, hoisted the jib, and the schooner climbed the tumultuous slopes of green with straining timbers and sail like a drum, and tumbled and wallowed in the terrible green valleys with slatting ropes and flapping canvas, and then plunged forward and upward again as the wind caught her, and Angaray held his breath and acted a dozen times as though he would save her from sinking by his convulsive grip on the stern railings.

He was standing so by Barracott's side, and the latter had just said he would turn in now and have a long sleep, when a shout from one of the men forward stopped him.

"Something in the water ahead, sir."

"What is it?"

"Can't make out. Looks like a whale."

All eyes were straining in the direction indicated. Barracott stepped into his cabin and returned with a long-barreled telescope.

"It's a boat," cried one of the men.

"Or a porpus."

"A boat, bottom up."

"Yes," said Barracott, steadying the glass on the roof of the deck-house, "a boat bottom up."

They were overhauling her rapidly, and now even the landsman's eye could see that the round black object laboring heavily up the slope of a great green mountain in front was indeed a boat, washing along bottom up, and gleaming and shining with the lick of the waves that broke over her continuously.

The rolling hill of water passed from under her, and with a flippant heave of the stern she disappeared. But they caught sight of her almost instantly, laboring up another hillside, and now she was nearer, a melancholy waif and stray on the desert of tumbling waters.

"God!" gasped Barracott suddenly, dropping the glass on the deck-house roof.

Angaray grabbed it as it was rolling away.

The captain looked at him with the vacant stare of one recovering from a swoon, looked back at the boat, and then again at Angaray.

"What's wrong, captain?"

"Look!" he said hoarsely, "look!" and passed the back of his hand across his eyes and forehead.

Angaray steadied the glass on the roof and tried to find the boat, and felt the captain's eyes burning into the back of his head all the time.

His unaccustomed hand and eye failed at first to find it, but at last it crept suddenly across the heaving tumult at the end of the glass. It was topping a wave, the wet black stern cocked for the downward slide, and on it in gleaming white letters Angaray read the word "ISOBEL."

"Good heavens!" he cried, and the eyes of the two men met: incredulous amazement in the one's, half scared triumphant astonishment in the other's.

"What does it mean?" asked Angaray.

"It means we're on the right track;" and with a laugh that set Angaray's nerves jarring, Barracott flung down to the cabin.

But at supper time he came in and sat down to the first hot meal they had had for six days, and his mood had changed. Angaray had expected to find him in crazily high spirits. He found him moody and silent, and when they had finished, he broke out:

"What color was that boat, Mr. Angaray?"

"Black."

"Sure?"

"Certain! Black as a hat. Might have been dark green. It looked black."

Barracott's brows knitted and he drummed on the tablecloth, as was his wont when put out.

Angaray smoked in silence and waited.

"The *Isobel's* boats were white," said the captain gloomily, at last.

"Why, good heavens, man! you didn't really think that was one of your old boats?"

"Aye! we lost one just hereabouts."

"Seven years ago!"

"Seven years ago—just here!"

"Oh, come, Barracott, use your common sense. Do you mean to tell me any boat ever built could knock about in these seas for seven years and still be afloat?"

"You saw it."

"I saw a black boat marked *Isobel*—yes! but she never had anything to do with your *Isobel*."

"Maybe seven years' knocking about turned her black."

"Nonsense! it would turn her to sodden punk."

"Maybe, maybe! but you saw her with your own eyes."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Angaray, and blew out a disgusted volley of smoke. "Don't let this crazy idea of yours carry you too far, captain, or we shall all suffer for it."

"It's worked out wonderfully so far, hasn't it?"

Angaray shrugged angrily, and refused to discuss the matter. He was not going to tickle the bee in the captain's bonnet.

Next day broke heavy and gray. The wind died out, and left them wallowing helplessly among the great green rollers, with nothing to do but watch the reeling masts and wonder which would be the first to go.

In the early morning, weary of the chaos without, which made his head reel and his eyes ache, Angaray was sitting on the edge of the bunk in his cabin, chatting with old Ericsson.

He was a quaint old soul—thoughtful beyond the ordinary—wide-traveled and full of strange sea lore. He lay in the narrow bunk enjoying the longest rest he had had for many a day, his eye bright and sparkling, his hands curved ever to the grasp of an invisible rope, ready for duty the moment his strength permitted, and Angaray rejoiced to think that to him had been accorded the privilege of rescuing that brave old body from death.

A sudden hoarse shout of "Angaray! Angaray!" from the captain on deck, brought him out on the run.

Barracott in his eagerness had followed his voice and was standing inside the door of the deck-house. He grasped Angaray's arm in a grip that felt as though the skin was burst. He whirled him out on deck with his face to the east.

The men were all hanging over the port bulwarks, buzzing with surprised ejaculations.

"Look! look! look!" he cried, "saw you ever the like of that?"

The rout of scurrying clouds had parted halfway up the sky, disclosing, as through the opening of a curtain, a background of pure pale greenish blue, and on this—wonder of wonders—hung, trembling and shimmering, the semblance of an island—an island of the shape of a horseshoe, with a bar across the opening, and on the bar a something which might well be the hull of a ship.

Angaray reached up a blindly groping hand to the roof of the deck-house, and steadied himself by it. Nature demanded something tangible to lay hold of. He hung there to the rolling of the ship, and gazed at the apparition with slackened jaw and wide, incredulous eyes.

It was astounding, it was incredible; and yet there it was before his eyes, clear as a limelight picture thrown on a screen; and it seemed to him that it swung gently to and fro.

"Well!" cried Barracott, in a high-strung voice, "what do you make of that?"

Angaray shook his head helplessly. This last surpassing wonder shook his faith in the hard, common sense, matter-of-fact actualities of life. They seemed to him to have as little solidity and foundation as the sliddering, tumbling heaps of water outside.

"It passes belief," he said at last. "What does it mean?"

"It means," said Barracott, with a triumphant laugh, "that we're getting near the end. That is my island. That black spot on the reef is the *Isobel*."

"But you said you did not expect to find her there."

"I don't care. There she is."

"We're all gone crazy, I think. It won't bear thinking about or talking about. Something seems playing into your hands, captain, but whether it is God or devil, I don't know. Time will show."

"Aye! time will show, and we shan't have long to wait."

As they watched, the vision wavered and shimmered, then a volley of exclamations from the men announced its disappearance. They watched the

ghostly blue-green swath for a time, till the low clouds rolled back over it and blotted it out.

A gust of cold wind struck the ship. The captain hoisted main- and fore-sails, and went thoughtfully to the wheel and altered the ship's course.

Angaray went back to the mate and retailed the whole matter to him, and old Ericsson assured him that the strange thing he had just seen was by no means unusual in those seas, and that he himself had witnessed similar sights more than once.

"The island itself may lie anywhere from fifty to a hundred miles away, and the captain will know from the send of the light which way it lies; but if he expects to find his old ship there, he'll be disappointed. It couldn't possibly be. Some other wreck, maybe, on the same reef."

All day long Captain Barracott paced the deck, with the restless abstraction of a wild beast in a cage, and with the same far-off, hungry look in his eyes. At times, by way of change, he perched himself up in the rigging, and hung there like a huge bird of prey on the lookout for its quarry. His long-barreled telescope played ceaselessly on the murky horizon, in the hope of wresting from it the secret he believed to be hidden somewhere just beyond.

He carried the schooner on wide-sweeping tacks, so that an immense space came under his range, and nothing lying within the extreme points of his sailing was likely to escape his notice.

His face was set like a flint, and when Angaray came on deck and spoke to him, he simply put up his hand and passed on. The culminating point of his life lay somewhere just behind the dusky curtain that

encircled them like a mighty tent. It lay somewhere just beyond the point of his bowsprit, and within appreciable distance. He knew it; he felt it; but he could not talk about it.

The men, too, were alive to the fact that the end of the quest was at hand, and every keen eye on board was glued to the low dark sky-line, on the lookout for the first sight of land.

It was four in the afternoon when the restless movements of the captain settled suddenly into a long, steady gaze toward the southeast. He swung himself up into the rigging and glued his eye to the telescope, and the crew to a man watched his every movement.

He looked, and looked, and looked, and the glass began to shake. He steadied it against a rope and humored the focus a trifle. Then at last, after an endless pause, he shot the barrels home with a sharp triple click and dropped to the deck.

His face was all a-quiver with emotion. He walked to the wheel, took the spokes from the steersman's hands, and turned the schooner's head in the direction in which he had been looking.

The men raised a cheer, which brought Angaray out on deck.

"What is it?" he asked, and looked at Barracott.

"It's there!" he said, and pointed straight over the bows.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WRECK ON THE REEF.

AN hour's steady sailing brought into easy view the low, rounded ridge of the island, and another hour brought them within a mile of it. The light was fading fast, and with commendable prudence, and a self-restraint marvelous under the circumstances, Barracott decided not to attempt a landing that night.

Silently the schooner drew past the opening of the horseshoe, and on the reef that barred it was piled the hull of a ship. Every eye on board was focused on it. Wan Lee leered at it from his galley-door, and the mate stood in the doorway of the deck-house.

Barracott had given up the wheel to one of the men, and stood with his telescope leveled over the top of the house.

His nerves had been strung like fiddle-strings all day, and now of a sudden he fell a-trembling, and the glass shook so, in spite of its resting on the roof, that he could hardly see through it.

Angaray, standing by his side, saw his face white with beads of sweat standing on his forehead, and his lips apart. But that he knew the man, he would have said that he was stricken with mortal fear.

A sound issued from the captain's lips betwixt a sigh and a groan.

"What is it, captain? What's wrong?" cried Angaray, quite unable to keep silence.

"I buried them," said Barracott hoarsely, "I swear I buried them, everyone, and they are lying there on

the sand, every one of them, just as I found them. God in heaven, how can that be?"

They would be past the opening in another minute. Angaray grasped the telescope and leveled it at the beach. It took him a second or two to get the focus, and then there bobbed into sight the big hull of the wreck, beyond it a white strip of beach, and on the beach one, two, three, four, five, six black bodies of men, lying a little apart, huddled up some of them, but bodies without a shadow of doubt. Then the lower arm of the horseshoe rose between him and them, and he turned and looked at Barracott with eyes full of amazement.

Barracott was gazing at the island as though mesmerized.

"I must go," he said, "I must go—and see"; and moved toward the middle of the ship.

But the mate caught him by the arm as he passed and said:

"Not to-night, captain. Don't go to-night. Look at the weather. If it comes on to blow, we can't stop here. It can wait well enough till morning."

"But the men!"

"They're all right, they can wait!" said the mate, not knowing to what he referred.

"Aye, aye, they'll wait all right!" said Barracott musingly. "They've waited long enough. But what in the devil's name are they doing there? I tell you I buried them, every one."

"Well, well," said the mate, humoring him, for he thought the attainment of his hopes had unstrung his mind, "you stand off and on through the night, and you'll find 'em all ready for you in the morning."

The gloomy day was drawing in, and the wind blew in short gusts and puffs. Barracott's sailorly instinct bade him stick close to his ship. By his orders they tried for bottom, and finding none, they made a fair offing and beat to and fro all night. The captain never left the deck, and never took his eyes off the island. No one on board thought of sleeping, except Wan Lee, who needed nothing less than a hurricane and the fear of immediate death to disorganize him.

With the first flush of dawn Barracott ran down as close to the reef as he dared take the schooner. Then he hove her to, and swung out the boat. He ordered a couple of men into her, and turned to Angaray.

"Are you coming?"

"Yes, I'm coming," he said; and dropped into the boat by Barracott's side.

They pulled rapidly in toward the reef, the captain's eyes straining wide and full on the wreck, his head bent eagerly forward.

The light was still dim when they drew close in to the wreck, and Angaray noticed the captain's hand on the gunwale of the boat, gripping it so tight that the knuckles stood out like ivory knobs, and he could see him shaking with nervous tremors.

They passed close under the stern, which lay almost under water, so high had the forepart run up on the reef. The name of the ship and the port from which she hailed had been roughly erased, and Angaray vaguely wondered why.

The captain held up his hand suddenly.

"Stop! Back up close," and the stern of the boat ground up against the stern of the ship.

He bent over and examined the hasty erasure, and

Angaray, following his every look, experienced a sudden shock as the almost obliterated letters seemed to his imagination to suggest the word *Isobel*.

He caught his breath sharply and looked at Barracott. But the captain's eyes were running rapidly over the ship and taking in every detail, and Angaray's eyes followed. He noted the stumps of the masts, the jagged splinters still white and raw, the smashed bulwarks, the raffle of broken ropes.

Then Barracott waved his hand, and the boat passed on along the edge of the reef. He steered it through the gap at the end, and they turned into the oil-smooth water of the lagoon, and swept on toward the beach.

Barracott's face was set like a mask, but Angaray could see the teeth grinding under the tense skin, and knew that he was holding himself in with a tight hand.

The nose of the boat grated on the sand. The men jumped out and dragged her well up. Barracott and Angaray stepped ashore, and went straight up the beach to the bodies. The men had not seen them till now, and they saluted them with wondering oaths, and looked down on them with awed curiosity.

Barracott bent over each one and turned each dead face to heaven; but his examination was soon over, and he passed on toward the ridge in the middle of the island.

Angaray followed slowly, and the two sailors sat down on a hummock above the bodies and discussed them.

Barracott disappeared over the ridge, and Angaray followed in his footsteps. As he topped the crown of the ridge, he got a slight shock of surprise at finding Barracott seated on the slope on the other side, and

at his feet two more dead men, one holding a revolver, the other a Winchester repeating rifle.

Barracott sat looking grimly at them, and when Angaray hove in sight, he gave a short, harsh laugh, and kicked the body nearest him, the man with the revolver.

"That's the devil that wrought all the mischief down below there," he said. "Shall I tell you the story, Mr. Angaray? These two made up their minds to get rid of the others, and they came up here and did the job with that," indicating the Winchester with his toe. "Then this one thought to make all safe by getting rid of the other, and shot him; and the other had strength enough to blow the top of this one's head off. That's how it went. A bloody business—a bad, black, bloody business!" And he dropped his face into his hands and so sat.

He looked up at last, and Angaray was startled at the gleam in his eye, and the worn, haggard look on his face.

"Saw you ever the like of this, Mr. Angaray? Seven years—and the island just as I left it—the wreck on the reef,—*Isobel* too,—you saw the name yourself,—the bodies on the beach. And yet it is all wrong. Eight bodies, and there were only six. And I buried them safe, every one; and there they lie on the beach. And the *Isobel* on the rocks there—but my *Isobel* was a bark, yon's a schooner, and mine was white—same as the boat we lost. She's black, same as the boat we found. But it all doesn't matter a red cent if only the gold's there. And now we'll go and find it."

He sprang up and started off at a run, and Angaray followed. He ran along under cover of the ridge, and

stopped once to crawl up and peer over it to see what his two men were doing. Then he sped on again till they came to the end of the ridge, where it broke and fell away toward the sea. Here the slope of volcanic rock was pitted with deep indentations, and without a moment's hesitation Barracott sprang down toward one larger than the rest, the sides of which went down straight like the inside of a big chimney.

He gave a shout of exultation as he leaped in, and began throwing out the pieces of rock from the bottom.

"At last! At last! At last!" he cried. "After seven years!" and the rocks came flying out like bombshells, and Angaray had to dodge them as they came.

He heard Barracott's breath going like a pump, in short quick pants down in the hole, and the shower of rocks began to slacken. He heard him tearing at the smaller shingle, and a few handfuls came up like grape-shot.

He expected every moment the exultant whoop of discovery. But it never came.

Instead there came a dead silence. He bent over the shaft and peered into it. Barracott was lying in a motionless heap at the bottom.

Angaray lowered himself cautiously into the hole, and tried to raise him, but found it beyond his strength. He climbed out again and ran up the ridge, and shouted to the sailors who had wandered up after himself and the captain, and had found the other bodies.

They saw him, and came running to his shout.

Between them they hoisted the captain out of the

hole, and carried him slowly down to the boat, his hands, torn and bleeding, hanging limp like those of a dead man.

They laid him carefully in the stern, and pulled out to the ship, where a line of anxious faces lined the bulwarks.

The excitement of those on board waxed hot when they saw only three returning in the boat, and that the captain was not one of the three, and hotter still when they could make out the fourth recumbent figure lying in the stern, and volleys of objurgative speculation played to and fro along the line of straining faces.

They drew him carefully on board, and carried him down to his cabin, and laid him in his bunk; and then, while the mate and Angaray attended to him, those on deck overwhelmed the two who had been ashore with pointed questions.

But the gist of their replies, stripped of all sailorly embroidery, amounted only to this:

“There’s eight dead men there, an’ it’s a gehenna of a place, an’ we sat a-lookin’ at ’em, an’ when Mr. Angaray shouted we ran, an’ we found the cap lying at bottom of a hole, where he’d seemingly been grubbin’ with his fingers till they was all torn to pieces; an’ we picked him out and brought him aboard. No, we don’t seem to want much to go back; there aint nothin’ but dead bodies, and nothin’ to do, and it’s a gehenna of a place,” and so on.

Meanwhile Angaray and the mate were doing what they could for the captain, and discussing matters earnestly the while.

“Brain fever, or brain gone altogether, I guess,” said Ericsson. “He was bound to break down. No

man could stand what he's gone through and not suffer for it. I knew it must come, but if he'd found the gold it would have braced him up and he wouldn't have had it so bad. The hole was empty, you say?"

"Nothing in it but a few small stones, as far as I could see. Could he have mistaken the place?"

"Not likely. It's never been out of his mind for a day these seven years past, I reckon. You say he went straight to it?"

"As straight as a shot, and jumped into it with a whoop."

"Aye, aye! Trust Jim Barracott to remember where he'd hid it, and when he found it was gone it just broke him all up. I doubt if he'll get his brain back."

"We must do our best for him."

"We'll do all that. Jim Barracott's more to me than any man in this world. We'll not let any bit of him slip if we can help it."

"Will you make any further search for the gold?"

"We're bound to do that for his sake. We'll have a good look round, and then if we find nothing, we'll clear out and make for the islands, and do what we can in the way of trade. Trust the men to turn that island upside down before they make up their minds the money's gone."

They turned up medicine chest and book, and treated their patient for brain fever.

He lay till noon in dead stupor, not moving so much as a finger. Then the machinery began to work again. He began to toss and mutter, and the burden of his raving was:

"Gone—gone—gone!—all gone! and eight dead

men to guard it—six there were, and I buried them—seven years—seven years—and eight lay there awaiting me. Mistake? Who says mistake? Never out of my sight whole seven years. No mistake!—it's gone—gone—gone! white bark, black schooner—eight—seven—six—all wrong—all wrong—the devil's in it—all wrong—and it's gone—all gone!—all gone wrong!”

Angaray put fresh wet cloths on his head, which dried them in five minutes. He held him down in the bunk when he tried to get out, and did his best to pacify him; but it was arduous work, and the captain's frenzy increased at last to such an extent that they had to run a brace over his chest to bind him down to the bunk.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BEE HUMS AGAIN.

ERICSSON in the meantime had run a stout cable with a kedge to the reef, and, the wind blowing straight over the island, the schooner swung to it, out of reach of the coral teeth so long as no change of weather came.

Then, though still feeble himself from his recent sickness, he took all four men in the boat, leaving Angaray and Wan Lee in charge of the ship, and went ashore to make further search for the treasure. The dead men they left where they lay. Their own time might be short if the wind changed, and their own concerns came first.

They delved deeper into the captain's hole, but five

minutes brought them to bed-rock with no discovery of gold.

Then they examined every likely hole in the neighborhood, and still found nothing. They rambled over the island, scratching and grubbing here and there, but all with no result. So at last the mate called them off the search, and they pulled, crestfallen and dispirited, across the lagoon and through the opening and along the reef to the wreck. They scrambled on board and overran it, but found little for their pains. Busy hands had already been at work there. Burst lockers, broken chests, torn-down paneling were everywhere, and their contents lay scattered about in wildest confusion.

One of the cabins had evidently been occupied by a woman, and tiny garments and some broken toys and picture-books indicated the presence of a child also. The captain's wife and child, they surmised, and wondered what had become of them, for there were no other signs of them ashore or on board.

The fittings of the cabins were unusually good; the cargo, such as there was, seemed to consist of Chinese silks and tea, and a glance into the lazarette showed it to be abundantly stocked with good things.

The mate searched for papers, but found none, and surmised that they had been destroyed. Piecing things together—the erasure of the ship's name, the lack of papers, the ripped-open state of everything on board, the dead bodies ashore—his experience told him there had been trouble on board before the catastrophe of the reef, and that matters had culminated in the final holocaust ashore.

He used the captain's identical words in describing

matters to Angaray: "A bad, black, bloody business, I fear. Mutiny and murder, if I know any of the signs of them." He let the men load the boat to the gunwale with pickings from the cargo and the lazarette, and then in the dusk of the evening they pulled back to the schooner.

They buoyed their cable and made a good offing for fear of the weather, and stood off and on all night as before.

Angaray and the mate discussed matters thoroughly, and Ericsson gave it as his opinion that the treasure had all been lifted long since, while Barracott had been prosecuting his vain searches for the island.

They decided, however, to remain one more day and give the island another thorough ransacking; "though," said the mate, "it's like looking for a needle in a haystack. A hundred million dollars might be hid there and we'd never find it, with no indications where to look for it."

Next morning they ran down to the island again, picked up their buoy, and hitched on to the cable; and Angaray with the four men went ashore in the boat, leaving Ericsson and Wan Lee in charge of the ship, and of the captain.

Barracott still lay straining at his bonds in his bunk, and they dared not loose them, lest he should do himself and them a mischief. All they could do for him they did, and watched him solicitously night and day, their ears wearied with the ravings of his delirium.

Angaray and the men searched the island from end to end for indications of the treasure, but they found nothing, and returned empty-handed to the schooner

at nightfall, picking up their kedge from the reef as they passed.

The mate got sail up and turned the schooner's bow to the northwest, and the ill-fated island sank down among the shadows, from which it had emerged so charged with hope three days before.

A sense of gloom, born of dead bodies and fruitless search, and the occasional sound of wild shouts and laughter from the captain's room, pervaded the ship, and among the men a feeling of keen disappointment which they vented in surly growls and muttered ob-jurgations, and a slackness in obeying orders which caused old Ericsson to slip a revolver into the pocket of his pea-jacket.

Their ill-humor, however, showed no further head, and the mate began to hope it might work itself off in a natural way without any disturbance of the peace.

All that day and all the next they jogged quietly along before a gentle breeze, and every mile they put between themselves and the island seemed to bring relief to the captain's troubled brain. His violent raving ceased, he lay quiet and exhausted in his bunk, and Angaray began to have hopes that the worst was past. They slackened his bonds the second night, and he slept till early morning like a tired child.

Angaray had insisted on taking charge of him, and the mate, still weak from his fever, was sleeping the sleep of the just in Angaray's bunk, while Angaray, after a final look at his patient, had flung himself down on the cabin locker.

He started up into sudden wideawakefulness with the consciousness of someone having passed through the cabin. Ericsson, he supposed—and composed

himself on his locker again. But he had not lain a moment when the sound of sharp, angry voices on deck, and then a pistol shot, startled him on to his feet toward the deck-house door. The door of his own cabin opened at the same moment and the mate came out.

"I thought you were on deck," said Angaray.

"No, what's wrong? I thought I heard a shot."

"Yes," and they ran together out on deck.

The ship was shaking in the wind, and someone at the wheel was shouting orders to the men.

"It's the captain," said Ericsson excitedly. "What kind of a coil is this?"

A bullet whistled past his ear by way of answer. There came a shrill womanly scream from the waist of the ship, then a bundle of white clothes pitched out of the galley and lay still on the deck.

"That's Wan Lee," said the mate, and both he and Angaray dived into the shelter of the deck-house, while the captain, in striped pink and white pyjamas and a pea-jacket, stood by the wheel, stamping the deck, and roaring orders to the men, who hung, a scared, sulky group, in the bows.

"Two minutes to get her round," he roared, "or I'll make cold meat of every mother's son of you, you white-livered jelly-bags!"

"One minute gone! Tail on, or down you go!"

The men broke and rushed to the ropes, the captain spun the spokes round, the schooner turned on her heel and went dancing away back on the course she had come.

"Good God, what's to be done? He's off his head again," said Angaray.

"He is," said the mate, "and what's more, he's in possession of the ship, and he's going right back to that cursed island, and it's as much as anyone's life is worth to try and stop him."

"What's to be done?"

"Nothing. We can only wait. Perhaps some other idea will take him."

"This is awful," said Angaray.

"Aye, it's bad," said the mate, "but it's worse for yon poor thing, Wan Lee, though we can spare him better than one of the others."

"We could shoot him down," suggested Angaray, in his panic.

"Aye, we could, but we won't; not if we can help it, anyhow."

"All our lives are in danger."

"So, th' are, but we've got our chances, and he's got to have his. If you shoot him, his chances are over. It's not Jim Barracott that stands there in his pea-jacket and pyjamas, it's his devil. Jim's got to have his chance of coming back."

When dawn came the deck was clear, save for the body of Wan Lee, which lay with the arms spread wide and the face turned sideways, as though in falling he had tried to save it from bruising on the deck. The bullet had caught him right between the eyes, and a crimson streak had zigged down toward the scuppers. The men were hidden in the fo'c's'le. Angaray and the mate kept inside the deck-house. The schooner was running free before the wind, and making good way.

Presently they heard the captain's voice again.

"Now then, there! tumble up one of you, and get

me food. Do you hear, or must I come and rout you out?"

"I'll go," said the mate, "he won't shoot me, an' if he does, I'd sooner him than anyone else."

He seized what was left of last night's supper from the table—meat and biscuit and a pot of cold coffee, the last ministrations of Wan Lee—and slipped round the corner of the deck-house with them.

Barracott stood at the helm, a grotesque figure, but, with a revolver-butt showing out of each pocket and the demon of madness peeping out of each eye, terrible enough to make the mate thankful when he stood once more inside the deck-house with a whole skin.

The captain had taken no notice of him, but seized the food and ate savagely.

And so, all day long, the madman, guided by God knows what instinct or intelligence, ran the ship back toward the island in a bee line, and by dusk they were within a couple of miles of it.

Ericsson's fear now was that he would ram her right on to the reef, and so make an end of them all; but, mad as the captain was, he was sailor to the fingertips. He called to the men to shorten sail, and Ericsson ran to the fore-castle and told them to come out, and assured them there was no danger as long as the madman got his way.

They came up one by one, with scared, over-shoulder glances at the captain, and fearfully did his bidding, keeping their backs turned to him as though the sight of their faces might tempt him to shoot.

And so, under easy sail, the *Bluewing* drifted slowly past the face of the island.

A burst of wondering profanity from the men in the

bows, succeeded by a dead silence, startled Angaray and the mate, and in another moment the drift of the ship showed them what had caused it.

On the beach, where the six dead men lay, there gleamed and flickered a tiny light, now glowing up, now dying down, but burning brightly all the time. Every eye on board was fixed on it, and every jaw hung slack.

The men fairly groaned with fear and horror. They cast terrified glances astern, and when speech came back to them, they swore terrible and desperate oaths, and spoke of "ghost-lights" and "corposants," and such things.

The hull of the wreck hid the light for a moment, but the glow of it could still be seen on each side, and they opened it again immediately and gazed at it till they drifted out of sight.

All night long they beat about, and whenever they opened the horseshoe, there the baleful light was glowing.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

TOWARD morning Angaray was nodding with weariness on the locker of the deck-house, when Ericson came in quietly from the deck and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Come out, Mr. Angaray," he said quietly, "he's gone."

"Who?—the captain?—where?"

"I can only guess."

Angaray followed him to the wheel, and there in a heap on the deck, just as he had dropped it, lay the captain's pea-jacket, with the two revolvers still in the pockets.

"Good heavens, where's he gone?" cried Angaray.

"There, I expect—where he wanted to be," said the mate, nodding toward the island which loomed dim through the dawn about two miles away.

"He'd never reach it alive."

"I cannot tell, but we must go and see."

"You'll never get the men to go. They're scared out of their lives."

"They were last night. They'd sooner have been shot than think of it. They won't feel so bad in daylight. Anyhow, they've got to go"; and he hauled the revolvers out of the pockets of the captain's jacket and shoved them into his own.

As soon as the day showed he took the wheel and called to the men to get some sail on her.

"I'm in charge at present," he said.

"Where's the captain?" said one.

"Captain's all right, and I'm carrying out his orders. Run up that mainsail, and don't stand jawing there."

The men hung in the wind for a second. Ericsson touched the butts of his revolvers significantly.

"I've got the captain's arguments at my finger tips," he said; "if any of you want to argufy, now's the time."

But they had no stomach for argument, with Wan Lee's blood still red on the deck, and they sulkily ran up the sails, and gathered in the bows a seething little heap of incipient mutiny, when they saw the mate

head the schooner straight for the reef and the opening of the horseshoe.

At the revolver's point he had the sails brailed up, and the boat got out with kedge and cable as before. Then, with every man of the crew sitting in front of himself and Angaray, who both held cocked revolvers, he had the kedge carried to the reef and secured there, and then, with a deep breath, he turned the boat's nose to the opening into the lagoon.

The men's eyes glared from the mate's set face to the wicked, round, unwinking eyes of the revolvers. The veins stood out in their necks and foreheads, and their damp hair straggled wildly as they endeavored to snatch hasty glances at what they might be coming to.

The keel grated on the beach, and in a moment they were overboard and facing up toward the unknown, regardless of the revolvers behind.

The sun glinted warm and bright on the strand of broken shells, and all eyes ranged to and fro for the bodies of the six dead men.

They had disappeared, and the men all breathed more freely.

And then, suddenly, and as if it were out of the ground, a hundred yards away in the direction of the ridge, there appeared a woman, who gave a cry when she saw them, and bent and picked up a child who was clinging to her skirts, and came running toward them.

"Thank God for the sight of you!" she panted, as she drew near. "I began to fear we had seen the last of any faces but our own. Oh, it has been weary, weary work, day after day, and nothing but sea and sky."

"Are you alone?" asked Angaray.

"My husband is here, in the tent there. He is dying, I fear. He was ill when we started. I fear he won't last long."

"And the dead men?"

"I dragged them to the sea and threw them in. I had to. It made me sick, but it was better than having them there. How did you know about them?"

"We were here four days ago."

"And we reached here three days ago. Why did you come back?"

"The captain brought us back."

"God bless him for it all his life. Where is he?" She looked at Ericsson.

"We don't know," he said simply; and the men started at the word. "We came to look for him."

"How?" she said wonderingly. "I don't understand."

"He was ill and off his head, and he slipped overboard this morning, and we feel sure he was for coming ashore here."

"Ah! where can he be? Let us find him, that I may thank him."

The small boy in her arms, a splendid sturdy little fellow clad only in a shirt, regarded them all solemnly, with his finger feeling in his mouth for new discoveries in the way of teeth, and his blue eyes big with wonder.

"Yes, we will search for him," said the mate, and bade the men scatter along the beach and the reef, and shout if they found anything. He himself took the boat and sculled across the lagoon to the inner side of the reef over against the wreck.

"That's the most likely place to find him," he said to Angaray as he started.

"And how come you to be in this plight?" asked Angaray of the woman. "Had you anything to do with the schooner there?"

"Yes, that was our ship. The men mutinied and turned us adrift in the boat ten days ago. My husband is a merchant in China—John Brodie of——"

But Angaray had stumbled and fallen among the broken shells. His heart had leaped with so wild a convulsion that it was like a stab in the side, and for a moment he could not breathe.

"Pardon me," he said at last, raising a white face to her wondering one, and speaking in a voice that sounded thin and strange to himself. "We have had terrible times on our own ship lately. The captain went out of his mind, and has had us all at his revolver muzzle for the last two days. I am rather overwrought—shall be all right in a moment."

"I thought you said your captain brought you back here."

"Yes," said he, talking to gain time. "He went mad and shot one man, and brought the schooner back here at the point of his revolver."

"Why did he want to come back?"

"He believes there is treasure here. We searched and found none, and he went off his head. But—you were telling me about—yourself."

"My husband is John Brodie of the firm of Brodie & Ayrton of Shanghai and London. He had been working so hard that he broke down, and his doctor made him take this voyage. He bought the schooner there, and fitted her out. We had terrible weather,

and got driven out of our course. The captain was killed by one of the falling masts, and the mate and another man were washed overboard, all in one day. Then the men mutinied and sent us adrift in the boat, and we floated, God knows where, to and fro, wherever wind and waves chose to carry us. Three days ago we drifted on to the other side of this island,—our boat is there yet,—and we found the *Isobel* wrecked on the reef, and the men all lying round dead. They must have fought among themselves. Will you come and see my husband, and tell me if you can do anything for him?"

And Angaray bowed his head, and followed her over the beach.

The small boy turned his head over his mother's shoulder, and looked back at him with those wondrous wise eyes of his, which seemed to Angaray to read him through and through, and to know more about him than he knew himself, so closely allied in looks are profoundest wisdom and profoundest innocence.

CHAPTER XI.

TREACHERY.

So, in the sweetness of the morning, with a cloudless blue sky above, the white beach flashing and glinting, and the tiny waves of the lagoon laughing and dancing in the sun, everything outside him peaceful and bright and happy, Angaray followed Mrs. Brodie up the slope and wished himself dead. His blood ran thinner than water, his heart was a handful

of ashes. He wished that sickening stab which brought him down among the shells had been its last.

Fear had no place in him, still less curiosity, though that indeed quickened later. Somewhere up there lay a sick man. The sick man could do him no harm, and the first glimpse of him would unravel the enigma of his life.

But that was all as nothing to him. This startling and unexpected resurrection of the past, the sudden reimposition of his terrible burden, this fresh evidence of the futility of any hope of escape, overwhelmed him and crushed his life down into the ground. He had left it all behind, and shut the door on it—shut it tight forever. He had fled to this extremest corner of the earth, only to find that God's arm is a long arm, and that though a man may escape from the hands of his fellows, he still must fall into the hands of God, and the fullness of the meaning of that he had yet to understand. To him at present it meant expiation and punishment, a renewal of the torture he had already experienced. So much had this great sinner still to learn.

It was but a couple of hundred yards they had to go, but every foot of it was to Angaray an agony and a martyrdom—a veritable path of expiation.

But they had not covered half the distance when a shout from Ericsson turned both their faces toward the reef.

He was standing in the bows of the schooner waving his hat, and as they turned, he scrambled down into the boat, and came sculling rapidly across the lagoon.

“He has found the captain,” said Angaray, and ran

down to the shore to meet him. And as he ran he breathed a deep sigh of relief, and felt like a criminal whose execution is postponed for an hour by the breakdown of the gallows.

"He is there," said the mate, as he drew near, "we had better get him ashore. I couldn't handle him alone, and the schooner is not safe if it comes on to blow."

Angaray tumbled into the boat, and as Ericsson turned and sculled back across the lagoon his white drawn face caught the mate's eye.

"All this is telling on you, Mr. Angaray," he said; "you're not used to so much excitement."

"No," said Angaray, and they grounded on the reef.

The captain was lying, a sodden, apparently lifeless heap, on the deck, where he had crawled out of the water. He was in a state of utter collapse, and they carried him carefully into the boat, and pulled back to the shore.

Mrs. Brodie had stood watching them on the spot where Angaray left her. Suddenly, to their surprise, she came running down the slope, crying:

"Look, look!—the boat—your men!"

And turning, their hearts went cold. Beyond the reef they caught intermittent glimpses of a boat, manned by the four sailors, bounding out toward the *Bluewing*.

"Tumble in," cried Ericsson, "they're going to bolt and leave us."

They dropped the captain on the sand, and in a moment were urging their boat toward the opening of the lagoon, as fast as their strength could drive her.

The men saw them coming and bent their backs to the oars, and sent their boat plunging and leaping through the water. Ericsson ground his teeth and muttered objurgations.

"Oh! the skunks! the mean, cowardly skunks," he hissed, "and I picked them all myself. Put your back into it, man, it's life and death! If they reach the schooner, we're done. They'll best us," he groaned, glancing over his shoulder, "try 'em with a shot. If you could wing one of them, we'd stand a better chance."

Angaray tried a couple of shots, but his shooting was no better than his rowing, and the men in front waved derisive hands, and the distance between them increased. They were scrambling up the sides of the schooner before the other boat had made half the distance from the shore.

The cut cable fell with a long sullen splash, and the sails began dropping with a rapidity which at any other time would have excited the mate's eulogistic comments. He rowed on doggedly, but his face was white and his breath came in short groaning gasps. It was killing work for a man scarce five days recovered from the fever.

The schooner's head fell off, and she began to gather way. Ericsson stopped rowing and stood up with his revolver. He hazarded a shot, but the men kept well out of sight below the bulwarks.

With a bitter curse he snatched the oars again, and urged the boat forward. Then a new idea struck him. He rowed past the schooner's stern and slightly to leeward of her course, instead of following dead in her wake. It was only a chance, and a turn of the wheel

would spoil it; but he seized the chance and turned it to account. As the ship heeled to the breeze he caught a glimpse of the steersman sitting on the deck. His revolver rang out, and the schooner fell off and lost way. Before a new steersman could bring her back again, the boat's nose was bumping against the side.

"Now, you cowardly hounds," cried Ericsson, springing up the side of the ship and striving to drag himself over the bulwarks by his hands.

And then—horror of horrors!—he came crashing back into the boat with a scream of agony; a dark scowling face looked over into the boat, not a foot above Angaray's head, and with an instinctive movement he emptied his revolver at it. The boat's nose sliddered along the side of the quickly traveling schooner and swung free, and Angaray turned and looked down at the wounded man. Then he fell across the gunwale sick and convulsed, for the mate's left hand was gone—severed at the wrist by the clean straight cut of an ax, and the boat seemed full of blood.

It was a ghastly, ghastly job. The man was bleeding to death. Angaray tore his shirt into strips, and bound the bleeding stump round and round, using a thole-pin to form a tourniquet. Then, when his hands and knees stopped shaking, he took the oars and started for the shore. In their hurry to board the schooner the men had forgotten to fasten the painter of their boat, and Angaray now caught sight of it about fifty yards away. He pulled alongside, and catching the rope made it fast to the seat of his own boat, and then started once more for the shore, as

quick and as straight as his dead weights and his lack of skill would let him.

Mrs. Brodie was sitting on the ground with her hands clasped tight round her knees. She had placed herself to sunward of the captain's body, and drawn a fold of her dress to shelter his head from the fierce blaze. The small boy was delving up shells at her feet, and as Angaray drew near he put up a sandy finger and pointed to him with some childish prattle.

She understood the full significance of the retreating schooner—they were once more deserted, but still the presence of these other men gave her more courage and hope than she had had before they arrived. As the boat drew near she came hurriedly down to meet it.

"I hope he is not badly hurt? I saw him fall."

"They chopped his hand off, he was bleeding to death. I have stopped it as well as I could."

"And they have gone?"

"Yes, the cowardly brutes. Can you hold that arm while I lift him out? So! Now, can you help me to dress it? It's awful to look at, but it's got to be done. Can you stand it?"

"Yes, I can help. I went through an ambulance course at home. Oh, how terrible! Cruel! cruel!"

She turned sick at sight of the raw, ragged stump as Angaray had done. Then, with shaking hands and tight-pinched lips, they did their best to bind it up tight and firm, so as to stop the flow of blood.

"There seems to be a curse on this place," said Angaray, as they straightened up after their unpleasant task.

"And our only chance of leaving is gone," she said,

looking after the schooner, now hull down on the horizon.

"We have two boats left," he said.

"And three sick men, and a woman and a child!"

It was a forlorn company indeed, and his heart sank at the responsibility so suddenly thrust upon him, the only whole man of the lot.

"We must hope for the best," he said; but neither his face nor his voice was hopeful.

However, he knew of old that the best remedy for low spirits was a plunge over head into hard work.

"I must make a shelter for my patients," he said. "How did you contrive?"

"I scooped a big hole in the side of yonder bank. It is dry, soft, shell sand. Then I put the boat's mast across it and laid the sail on that, and piled sand all round the edges of the sail. It's quite cozy at night, but rather cramped."

"That's good. I will do the same. Can you give an eye to my two while I go to the schooner and get some things? But—your husband?"

"I ran up while you were fighting. He was sleeping still. You go, I will keep an eye on them all. Can you bring some food? The supply we had in the boat is almost exhausted."

"Yes, I will get everything I think will be needed. Is there water?"

"There is a spring at the other end of the ridge. It tastes a little odd, but not salt."

"All right; I will bring you everything else."

He took the clean boat and rowed laboriously across the lagoon to the wreck, and was gone an hour, but came back with the boat loaded to the gunwale,

and the first thing he threw to her was a big bundle of her own and the boy's clothes and some rugs.

"Oh, that is kind of you," she said, and the grateful glow in her eyes, and the soft color that ran for a moment over her white face, made him wonder suddenly why he had not noticed before how very fair and sweet that face was.

CHAPTER XII.

FACE TO FACE.

HE had brought with him a miscellaneous assortment of things likely to prove useful. A shovel from the galley—a spare topsail—blankets and pillows from the cabin bunks, and a big cushion from the cabin sofa—some crockery ware, and a caddy of tea, and a flat kettle from the pantry—a couple of tins of biscuit, and some cases of tinned meats—a bottle of brandy for the patients in case of need—and a traveling-bag fitted with brushes and such feminine necessaries, which Mrs. Brodie seized with another eloquent look of thanks.

"I will go back for more when I have dug my hole and covered it in. I must get these two under cover," he said.

And Mrs. Brodie, with new life in her at sight of the kettle, and the tea, and the traveling-bag, and the other amenities of civilization, said brightly, with the wisdom of a married woman:

"I will make you some tea and get you something to eat."

And she would not let him do anything more till he had eaten and drunk, and never in his life had he enjoyed a meal so much.

Then Angaray set to work with his shovel on the side of the ridge about twenty yards from the Brodie establishment, and inside an hour he had scooped out a fair-sized apartment, artistically furnished inside with broad divans of sand along each wall. Later on he embellished it in a number of ways, and made it into the most comfortable little house imaginable. But even in its primitive unfinished state, when he had drawn over it the sail roof, it was a habitation, and by no means unhomelike.

He laid blankets and pillows on the divans, and then managed with Mrs. Brodie's help, she taking the feet and he the shoulders, to install the captain and the mate in their places.

Barracott still lay in the stupor of utter exhaustion. Ericsson came to as they were carrying him up to the house. But he was very weak from loss of blood, and lay groaning feebly with the pain of his terrible wound.

Mrs. Brodie had gone over to her own house, the small boy toddling gallantly at her skirts, happy in the repossession of one of his Chinese toys, which Angaray had found in the cabin and popped into the bag.

She came back before Angaray had finished packing up his patients. He had given Ericsson a sip of brandy, and was trying to drop some down the captain's throat, when he heard the trail of her dress on the shells outside.

"My husband is awake now. He seems very weak. Won't you come over and see him?" she said.

But he had a good excuse for further postponement of the inevitable, and he did not fail to use it.

"Will you take him some of this cognac? It may do him good. I will come presently, but I must get all I can out of the ship before dark. Every tin of meat I can secure may be invaluable before we are through, and if the weather should turn bad the ship may go to pieces. I will make two more journeys, and bring what I can, and the rest must wait, and you must pray for fine weather."

He worked like a slave with the driver's whip over him for four hours, and broke out and brought away a great quantity of provisions of all kinds. Indeed, he was surprised at the size of the pile he was building up on the beach, and quite proud of his afternoon's work. But his muscles were quivering and his knees shaking with the unwonted exertion, as he was landing the second boat-load, and common sense told him to stop.

So he put on his coat and strolled up to the northern end of the island, and stripped, and, with a cautious eye for sharks, plunged into the sea and came out refreshed.

And now he must face whatever had to be faced in the Brodie house. It had to be done, so he set his teeth hard and walked along the ridge toward it.

Mrs. Brodie was standing at the door looking out, with her hand shading her eyes from the level beams of the sun. She saw him coming, and came up to meet him.

"He is sleeping again," she said. "Will you come in?"

"Yes, I'll go in now. Will you mind looking after my two patients for a time. Where is the youngster?"

“Asleep by his father. Will you tell me frankly what you think of him? I fear——” She shook her head and turned toward the other house. And Angaray bent his head and passed on to the reading of his riddle.

The man lay on the floor on a makeshift bed of rugs, tossing and moaning in his sleep, with a catch in his breath, and now and again a choking cough that came near to strangling him and yet did not wake him.

In spite of hollow cheeks, and sunken eyes, and unaccustomed growth of beard and mustache, Angaray knew him in a moment, and sat down on the ground, shaking as with an ague in spite of the grip he had got of himself.

It was McCaskie.

He was not very much surprised. His mind, racking up and down the weary round of possibilities, had more than once dwelt on this one as a possible solution of his terrible puzzle. Now, ranging back over all the past, he saw in a flash how it had all come about.

He sat crouching there with his chin on his knees, and his eyes fixed on the sleeping man, waiting for the supreme moment of his awakening.

It was long of coming, and he feared each moment to see the sick man's wife darkening the doorway, but it came at last. The heavy eyes opened wearily, and rested pensively on the white sand outside, and the darkening water in the distance. Then, with the instinct of a strange presence, they wandered round and rested on Angaray—in mild wonder at first, then with a startled blink as though to shake off a deceptive vision or the fragment of a dream.

Then, as they met Angaray's eyes full of pain and woe and awful understanding, a tremor seized the sick man, and a convulsion of coughing shook him till it seemed impossible to Angaray that he could come out of it alive.

"Ayrton!" he whispered at last—a hoarse whisper of utter incredulity—his head sawing up and down with the agonized laboring of his dilapidated chest.

"Yes!"

The sick man raised a weak hand, and dropped it, palm down, in a gesture of unutterable amazement.

A pregnant silence fell on them, while each eyed the other and tried to read his thoughts.

"You understand—all?" whispered the sick man at last.

"I understand it all now. You gave me a terrible time, but not worse than I deserved. If ever man expiated his fault by his suffering, I have."

"How do you come to be here?"

"I came to escape from hell—from myself and the past. . . . But it has been impossible, as it always is"—and as he said it, there flashed into his mind, high-strung with emotion, the voice and words of the old minister of his boyhood in the old kirk at home:

"Whither shall I go? Whither shall I flee?
If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there,
If I make my bed in hell, behold Thou art there,
If I take the wings of the morning
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there Thy right hand shall hold me."

How sempiternally human the sweet-voiced breaker of laws and commandments was. How exactly the words, ages-old, expressed his own experiences.

"What will you—do about it—now?" came the hoarse, anxious whisper of McCaskie, and his hand plucked nervously at the rug that covered him.

Angaray shook his head gloomily. He had no feeling of anger against this man. Why should he have? The crime had been his own, and he had had to suffer the consequences. This man had simply been a scourge in a higher hand, that strong hand from which he had come to learn there was no escape.

"For her sake—and the boy's," whispered the sick man brokenly, "let things be as they are. My time is short."

"Yes," said the other, "it is no matter now. I am James Angaray."

McCaskie burst out into another violent paroxysm of coughing. Angaray reached for a tin dipper, and found water in it. He slipped his arm under the sufferer's head and held it to his lips, and just then Mrs. Brodie came hurriedly to the doorway.

"The captain is coming to," she said, "and I think you had better go to him. He is muttering and talking, and I am afraid he may get violent. I will see to my husband. Are you feeling worse, John?"

But McCaskie had sunk back exhausted, and answered nothing.

"He just had a bad fit of coughing," said Angaray, and she followed him out of the house. "He seems very weak. Has he been like this long?"

"We were shipwrecked once before," she said, "before we were married, and he has never been really strong since."

"We must do all we can for him. I am glad I am here to be of service to you."

"You are very good," she said, and Angaray went away in the direction of his own hospital.

He found Barracott tossing about on his couch and rolling his head from side to side in the frenzy of returning consciousness. Angaray dipped a spare bit of the shirt he had torn up for Ericsson's benefit in water, and laid it gently on the captain's forehead. He gave the mate a sip of brandy and water, and then sat down by the captain's side.

"How's her head?" asked the latter suddenly and briskly.

"Straight for the island," answered Angaray.

"Right! keep her at that;" and he turned on his side and lay quiet.

There was no sleep for Angaray that night, tired as he felt with the day's doings.

He spread a rug on the soft sandy floor, and stretched his weary limbs on it, but he could not sleep, and after a time he got up and went outside and sat on the crown of the ridge, and listened to the rippling lip-lap of the tiny waves on the beach, and the wash of the surf on the barrier reef. And every now and again there came from the Brodie house the bellow of that terrible shattering cough, and from his own house the groans of the wounded man, and the broken mutterings of the delirious one.

He watched the great unfamiliar constellations blaze and sparkle, till they paled and shimmered away into the dawn, and a new day broke, clear as crystal, sweet and pure as a pearl of price.

He took a look at his patients, and then went away to the north end of the island and dashed into the

water again, and came out feeling fit and equal to another hard day's work.

Mrs. Brodie had the fire going by the time he got back, and was dividing her attention between a coffee pot which would not boil, and her son, whose ardent desire for the time being seemed to be to contribute his body to the flames. Angaray took him by the hand and gave him a jumping race down the shell beach, and the little fellow shrieked with delight and admitted the weary-souled man to his friendship.

As soon as he had eaten, he paid a brief visit to each of the invalids. His own two he was sure were improving, but McCaskie by daylight was an even more ghastly wreck than he had looked in the gloaming, and Angaray felt that the end was near and might come at any moment. He had difficulty, in fact, in keeping the deep concern and distress out of his voice, as he asked him how he felt, and the sick man's answer was not calculated to quiet his apprehensions. He answered, with the peevish irritability of one to whom life is a burden:

"I wish I were dead! This cough tears my rotten chest to pieces. You'd do me a kindness if you would shoot me."

He spoke recklessly, with no thought of what he was saying, or to whom he was saying it. But the deep flush on Angaray's cheek as he straightened up, and his pained, reproachful look as he quitted the house, brought the matter home to the speaker and filled him with regret.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WAY OF REDEMPTION.

MRS. BRODIE promised to keep an eye on them all, and Angaray went down to the boat and pulled off for the wreck.

He worked all day with an hour's rest for dinner, and brought over load after load of provisions in tins, and boxes, and barrels. There was any amount still left, and he bitterly regretted the lack of another pair of arms, and begged Mrs. Brodie to go on praying hard for fine weather. He hit on the plan of using both boats, leaving the loaded one he had just brought over for Mrs. Brodie to discharge, while he went back with the other for a fresh cargo.

And Mrs. Brodie, knowing the absolute necessity of securing all the provisions possible, worked as she had never worked before, and as she had never expected to be called upon to work.

But the hard work, and the sweet salt air, and the homely food, with the keen appetites they brought to it, did them both a world of good, and kept their spirits from sinking too low down.

Once Mrs. Brodie flashed out a rare sweet smile at some article he brought over out of her cabin, and after that he never left the ship without stepping into the cabin again and picking up one thing and another for her, in the hope of evoking it again. Among other things he one day brought over a dainty red morocco prayer-book, stamped with her maiden monogram, "I. E.," and little thought at the time to

what use it would first be put—less still how, later on, it would figure in one of the turning-points of his life.

In all, that day, he brought over eight boat-loads, of provisions mostly, with such articles of convenience and luxury as he came across in his iconoclastic onslaughts on bulkheads and panels. For, lacking knowledge of how to get at things, he simply used an ax and smashed his way to and fro in the interior of the schooner, in quest of variety as well as abundance.

If only the weather would hold, and it showed no immediate signs of change, there seemed no reason why he should not in time strip the ship bare.

Each day, too, he grew more skillful and rapid in his work, and, as the vast pile of provisions on the beach increased, he felt himself at liberty to occasionally devote a whole boat-load to things inedible. Beds and blankets from the bunks added immensely to the comfort of both hale and sick on shore. Chairs and a table from the cabin, crockery, glassware, and cooking utensils galore, books, lamps and oil, soap and towels and tablecloths, invested the settlement with an unusual and unexpected air of luxury.

He made a point of bringing over every single article he could lay hands on belonging to Mrs. Brodie and the boy; and her gratification at his exceeding thoughtfulness, expressed in the simplest of words and the most eloquent of looks, spurred him on to fresh endeavors on her behalf.

Then, having provided for comfort as well as for actual necessities, he devoted himself again to the solid hard work of transferring from ship to shore every case and cask remaining in the ship, so long as she held together.

From six in the morning till night fell, with bare intervals for food, he worked like a hero or a hungry docker, and his hands grew rough, and his muscles firm, and his heart strong, and almost light. Whatever the past, whatever the future, he was doing his duty in the sphere into which God had flung him, and, so far as in him lay, he was atoning for the one by providing for the other, and was spending himself in the service of those so strangely cast upon his care.

Of necessity Barracott and Ericsson had to be left much to themselves. The mate, though suffering agonies of pain from his roughly doctored amputation, and weak from the fever and subsequent shock and loss of blood, was pulling round, and was able to render trifling assistance in watching and ministering to the captain's wants. Barracott was struggling through the various stages of the fever, and was still light-headed though not often violent.

His constant question was, "How's her head?" and their regular reply, "Straight for the island," never failed to satisfy and pacify him.

Mrs. Brodie and little Ranald were glowing with health. They ate heartily, bathed every day, and reveled in the air and sun. The work of feeding the settlement, and unloading Angaray's unfailing succession of barges, left the wife too busy for useless repining, and the sight of her boy, growing sturdy and brown and merry as the day was long, kept the mother within arm's reach of happiness.

Her husband was dying—it seemed a miracle to find him still alive morning after morning, with that terrible cough shattering the remnants of his lungs and twisting his frail body into knots—but, so painful

was his passing: that in her heart she prayed that it might be short and the poor spent body be at rest.

Each night Angaray sat by his side in the dark for a time, and matters between them were talked out to the last word—almost. Angaray was to learn that the dying man had one final word to say to him, and that a strong one.

It came on the fifth night. Angaray had put in a great day's work, and his weary body ached for the straight, level stretch of his bed, but he came round as usual to companion the sick man, and sat down on the sand by his bedside.

One of the ship's lamps was propped up on a heap of sand, and cast grotesque shadows at every movement, and accentuated the bones and hollows of the sick man's face, and imparted to the gloomy little interior an air of unfamiliarity and change which made Angaray quite uncomfortable.

"Why, this looks quite festive. How do you feel to-night?" he began, with a forlorn attempt at cheerfulness.

But the sufferer's breathing was more painful than ever, and he only shook his head.

He pointed to his wife's writing-case, which lay open on the sand.

"My time is short," he gasped, "write for me."

And Angaray, with a sense of desecration, opened the lid of the case, and was aware of a delicate subtle fragrance which carried away his thoughts to its owner.

Slowly and painfully, punctuated with convulsive fits of coughing and contorted wrestlings for breath, McCaskie dictated to Angaray his last wishes.

It was a very short will, but it covered an amount that amazed Angaray beyond words, and caused him more than once to pause and regard the other with doubtfully raised eyebrows.

"It's right," said McCaskie, with just a dying flicker of the successful speculator in his straining bloodshot eyes. "I plunged heavily—came out on top—wearing work—wore me out. If you work out judiciously it means two hundred thousand pounds!" and the exultant gleam was quenched in a paroxysm of coughing that knitted knee to chin, to save his chest from disruption.

But Angaray's cup of surprises was not yet full.

"Half the total amount to my wife—for herself and the boy—half to my friend James Ayrton, now known as James Angaray—on condition—that he acts as trustee——"

Angaray dropped the pen in the sand, and had some difficulty in cleaning it. He unbent his back, and sat up, gazing in utter astonishment at the dying man. If the amount at McCaskie's disposal had astonished him, this singular proof of trust, where so much the reverse might have been expected, fairly astounded him. He could not be expected to comprehend the penetrating clearness of vision which sometimes lightens, like a flash from heaven, the eyes of those close cast for death, and pierces the outer husk and wrappings of the flesh, and bares for them the souls of their fellows.

McCaskie understood his amazement, and was prepared for it.

"You will undertake it?" he whispered eagerly. "Promise! Promise!"

Angaray put the pen carefully into its place, and dropped his twitching face into his hands.

“Promise—Promise!”

It meant everything—the giving up of all he had hoped for, longed for, striven so hard to compass.

“Promise!—Promise!”

It meant returning home—the renunciation of his freedom—the resumption of his terrible burden—the renewal of his expiation.

“Promise!—Promise!”

It meant facing all the dreadful possibilities of the future. It might mean facing all the terrible consequences of the past.

“Promise!—Promise!”

Could he do it? Was it reasonable? Was it possible?

He looked down at the sick man. Death was stamped clear and sharp on every line of his sunken face.

“Do you understand all that it means to me?”

“I understand—I know—perhaps—” said the dying man, with a far-away look in his eyes, a look which only began at Angaray, and went a very great way past him, past the walls of the tent, and the great spangled dome above—“perhaps—it is the way—” Then his voice trailed off into silence, and Angaray, not knowing whether he left him alive or dead, crept out of the house, and stumbled with bent head and clenched hands along the beach, to fight out his fight.

Could he do it? Give up everything that made life possible—the present—the future? Give up his freedom, deliberately fetter himself again with the

shackles of the dead past? And all to ease the passing of a man who was nothing to him—less than nothing—a man who had harried his life down to hell. It was not possible. He could not do it. Perhaps he was already dead. He cast himself face downward in the sand, and the tiny waves broke in long lines of rippling silver at his feet. And there the Black Angels and the White fought for his soul, and all the stars looked down and watched the fight.

He remembered lying thus once before at home. That day in Kew Gardens. Ah, the horror!—the ceaseless, curdling horror of it all! He writhed and groaned. How could he go back to it? How could he? How could he?

The memory of a calm, sweet face came back into his mind, and the sound of a voice like a silver bell. What was it she said?—aye: “The way of Redemption may be hard, but there always is a way.”

“Perhaps,”—he heard the broken whisper of the dying man as it trailed off into silence,—“perhaps—it is—the way——” What way?

“The way of Redemption—there always is a way.”

He rose at last, first to his knees, then to his feet, and as he stood upright his left hand went up toward heaven in a strange, wild, eloquent gesture of appeal which none saw save the stars.

Then he turned and went rapidly toward the pencil of yellow light which streamed out over the sand from the doorway of the Brodie house, and as he came into the light his face was pale and calm and set.

The eyes of the dying man fastened on his the moment he appeared. He had been bending eagerly for-

ward, waiting and listening. Now, without any word from the other, he sank back with a satisfied sigh—"Thank God!" and added, with the strange prescience of a dying man, "and may He wipe out all the past for you."

Angaray took the pen and the paper, and put the desk on his knees again.

"I will do my best for them," he said, "but I can take nothing for myself."

"You have a right—to half——"

"Not a penny," said the other sharply, and altered the document to suit.

"Have you none of your own people you want to remember?" he asked, as he raised his head from the paper.

"Not a soul. My sister died just a week before—that night. It was that decided me to take advantage of the wonderful chance. We were the only two left, and she had been an invalid all her life. No one—no one—let me sign."

"Wait, I will get the mate as witness also."

He went along to the other house, and found Mrs. Brodie talking quietly with old Ericsson.

"You have been a long time," she said, looking up at him, and the fragrance of the writing desk filled him for a moment and made his head reel.

"Yes," he said, very quietly, "I fear the end is near. He has been arranging his affairs, as you know. I want Ericsson here to come and sign as witness. I will come back for you in a minute, if you don't mind waiting with the captain. He seems better to-night."

"Yes, he is certainly better."

And the two men went off along the shell beach.

In the dim light of early dawn Angaray saw her coming along with the boy in her arms. She had a characteristic way of balancing his weight against her body, which gave her a peculiarly upright and stately grace of carriage.

He met her halfway, and with quick instinctive sympathy held out his hand. And as she clasped it, she said:

“It is over. He died before dawn, but it was no good disturbing you. His sufferings are over—it is well.”

She remained with the boy in their house, while Angaray, under the direction of the mate, performed the last offices for the dead in the little sand house along the ridge. Carefully but clumsily, for the use of the needle was foreign to him, he stitched up in a sheet the frail worn body, which looked strange and unfamiliar in its calm repose.

They made a rough stretcher with a rug and a pair of oars. Angaray bore the front, and Ericsson, for lack of his arm, carried the other end in the loops of a rope slung round his neck, and so they carried him over the ridge to the other side of the island, to the open sea which was to be his grave. And behind, for mourners, came the graceful woman bearing the child, whose eyes opened wide with expectant wonder; for indeed he was not quite sure that this was not some new play, arranged for his benefit by the brown-bearded man in front, who gave him races on the sand, and played with him as nobody else ever had done, and fought with him while he lay on his back among the shells.

They carried the body to an out-jutting point of

rock, where the side of the island sank sheer down into the depths, and there, carefully attaching a couple of bowlders to his feet, they buried him.

Mrs. Brodie silently handed to Angaray the little red morocco prayer-book he had brought from her cabin that day, and he turned to the burial service and read it quietly and clearly, she giving the responses, and the mate standing by in silence.

So, leaving him to the peace and loneliness of his mighty grave, they crossed the ridge again and took up their everyday work.

Mrs. Brodie, indeed, did not leave her house that day. Ericsson attended to the fire and boiled the kettle. He was still very weak, and it was for only such small one-handed jobs that he was able.

Angaray worked hard at his transportation, and got over four good boat-loads before nightfall. Then, before eating himself, he carried over to the other house a cup of hot tea and some meat and biscuit.

He found Mrs. Brodie sitting on the side of the empty bed. Little Ranald was building castles alongside, and hailed him with a gleeful shout.

With a gentle word or two she thanked him for his attention, and he began to attempt a few clumsy words of sympathy, but she said quietly:

“It is best for him to be at rest. We knew he could never get better, and the pain he suffered was terrible. It is best as it is.”

CHAPTER XIV.

DISCOVERIES.

WHEN Angaray returned to his own house he found the mate sitting outside by the fire, examining something carefully in the flickering light.

"What have you got there, Ericsson?" he asked. "Found something?"

The mate handed him a gold coin.

"An Australian sovereign! Why, where did you get this?"

"You'd never guess, Mr. Angaray," said Ericsson, with suppressed excitement.

"Then suppose you save time by telling me."

"I just took it from Captain Barracott. He has some more of the same kind."

"The captain? Why, where on earth could he get them?"

"I don't know. What do you think? He was turning them over and over in his hands and laughing over them like a child with a new toy."

They looked at one another in great surprise, for the captain was dressed only in his sleeping suit, and they could not imagine where the coins could have come from.

They went inside to see if any light upon the subject could be found there, but the captain's rambling, light-headed talk had subsided into sleep, and after many wondering surmises they gave the matter up.

In the middle of the night Angaray woke with a start, with the uncanny feeling of something unusual

going on around him while he slept. He lay quiet for a moment, straining eyes and ears—then he thought he heard a footstep outside, and sprang up, and struck a light. The captain's couch was empty, and Angaray turned and ran quietly in the direction in which he thought he had heard the footsteps.

He stood and listened, but beyond the lap of the waves on the beach below not a sound broke the stillness.

He went on again, and again stood and listened, and now he was sure he heard the sound of a low chuckling laugh round by the end of the ridge.

He went quietly forward, and again that low laugh caught his ear. The sound brought him to the edge of the captain's empty gold-hole where the treasure should have been, but was not; and as he was about to bend forward to look in, the captain sprang out of it, and sped swiftly round the other side of the ridge. Angaray had just time to step back to avoid a collision with him, then followed quietly, and presently came upon him sitting in the sand and chinking in his hand a quantity of coins.

Angaray sat and watched. Barracott played with the coins for a time, rattling them and tossing them from hand to hand. Then he dropped them into the sand and crept away over the ridge in the direction of the house. Angaray looked round for something to mark the spot with, but finding nothing, determined to sit there until the light came.

It was a curious vigil, but the time did not seem long—he had so much to think about. The wonderful good fortune of McCaskie, the promise he had given to look after the wife and child, this strange

discovery he had just made in connection with the captain, which might mean the recovery of the whole of the lost treasure—for it was evident to him that the captain, on the occasion of his original visit to the island, being light-headed just as he was at this time, had transferred the treasure, bit by bit, from the hole where he originally hid it, and diligent search might bring the greater part of it to light. As soon as the light grew sufficient he turned up the sand where he had been sitting, and presently came on a few scattered coins, Australian sovereigns of 1880. He dug on with his hands, sifting the sand through his fingers, and probing deep into it, and feeling carefully all round so that nothing should escape him. And at last his cold groping fingers scraped something more solid than sand, and working round it he unearthed a canvas bag open at the mouth and partly filled with sand, but the rest of it clinked merrily as he struck it with his hand.

He noted the spot carefully, and, lest the captain in one of his midnight excursions should fill in the hole and so mislead them, he went right down to their pile of firing, got a long stick of timber and drove it firmly into the hole.

Then, satisfied with his morning's work, he went down to breakfast, and to acquaint Ericsson with the news of his discovery.

Ericsson was greatly surprised, and agreed with Angaray that the recovery of, at all events, some portion of the treasure was probably only a matter of time and careful search.

The bag Angaray had brought with him contained 480 sovereigns. The rest of the 500 had probably

been dropped by Barracott in his handlings of it, except the few he had brought back with him for his own satisfaction.

At breakfast they informed Mrs. Brodie of the strange find, but it was decided that the treasure could wait, while the unloading of the ship could not, as a change for the worse in the weather would have no effect upon the one, while it would almost certainly destroy the other.

So, flinging the bag of useless gold into a corner, Angaray turned to his stevedore work, and hacked and hewed, and hauled and rowed, till his arms ached, and the sweat poured out of him. But every boat-load meant so many extra days' food for them, and all the gold in the world would not purchase for them a mouthful of bread on that desolate reef.

Each day Ericsson grew stronger, and able to render more assistance. His shortened arm was painful still, but he had it slung up and lashed to his chest to prevent it joggling, and with his other arm he helped Mrs. Brodie in the unloading of the boats, and it taxed Angaray's strength to keep him busy.

On one of his slow return journeys he found the mate sitting in the other boat, which he had pushed out from the shore, busy with hook and line, and hauling in fish in masterly fashion, while little Ranald was capering about the beach in gleeful admiration of several that he had thrown ashore. After that, for a long time they never lacked fish, and it was a welcome addition to their daily fare, and a still more welcome extension of the limit of their food supply.

The weather kept brilliantly fine, whether in answer to Mrs. Brodie's prayer or from natural

causes they could not tell, but they were equally thankful.

Day by day Angaray toiled at the unloading of the ship, until he had brought over every pound of eatables he could discover, and enough cases of tea out of the cargo to keep them drinking steadily for the rest of their lives, and bales of silk enough to clothe them all sumptuously.

The mate accompanied him several times, and assisted him well with his brains and his single arm, and they got ashore a large quantity of planking and spare spars and sails, together with tools and cordage. "For I'm thinking, Mr. Angaray," said Ericsson, "that if no ship comes to take us off, and I doubt if ships ever come this way except by accident, we'll have to rig up some kind of a craft sooner or later, and try to make for the nearest islands. When the captain gets his head again he'll be able to tell us best what to do."

But the captain's recovery was very slow. The fire of his madness for the lost treasure had well-nigh consumed him, and his return to health was almost like the building up of a new life. The very first day Angaray felt that he might not be shortening their lives by working at anything but the ship and cargo, he took his shovel and dug out a new and sumptuously appointed mansion a few yards from his own, with broad divans such as he had made for himself, and all closed in except a doorway and window facing toward the sea. He roofed it carefully with a spare mainsail, put in it chairs and a table from the ship, spread rugs on the floor and beds on the divans, and begged Mrs. Brodie to enter into possession.

She was delighted with her new house, and her thanks were very sweet to him. He would have liked to build one for her every day.

By the mate's advice, he carried over from the other side of the island a number of heavy pieces of coral and rock, and ran stout ropes over the roofs of both houses and secured them with rocks. "For," said old Ericsson, "if it comes on to blow from the sea, we might find ourselves with no roof but the sky, and that doesn't keep out wind or rain."

Angaray suggested that the sail roofs would not keep much rain out, and as an improvement they ran over each house an outer shell of deck planks, and then piled more rocks and sand on top, and so felt safe from all assaults of the weather.

They got their goods and provisions under cover also, and when Angaray had constructed a kitchen between the two houses, and had, with infinite labor, erected in it the cooking stove from the schooner's galley, he was a proud and satisfied man, and felt that there would soon be nothing left to do.

And now, as though tired of its complacency, and unable to control itself any longer, the weather broke. The sky darkened suddenly one afternoon, and the wind got up, and they heard the breakers roaring hoarsely on the reef, and saw the white spume come flying over into the lagoon, and even their own lagoon waves became things to be considered, and they ran their boats high up on the beach for safety.

All next day the wind howled, and the great rollers lashed at the reef, and they sat snug and warm, and wondered what would be left of the schooner.

Angaray devoted himself to little Ranald, romped

and played with him, lay on his back on the floor, and fought strenuous battles with him, the little fellow climbing up and down and over him, and shrieking with delight as usual. And then, at first to his infinite amusement, and afterward to his lasting confusion, the small boy, with the unreasoning deduction of childhood, began calling him "Dad—da!"

Mrs. Brodie was sitting in the room sewing when this happened first, and when Angaray in his surprise sat up suddenly, holding the struggling delinquent in a firm grasp at arm's length, in spite of a torrent of "Dad—da!—Dad—da!—Dad—da's!" he saw her fair face flush with a look of pained confusion.

He did not quite know what to do, so plunged headlong into the game again, and fervently hoped the mother would not imagine he had put the youngster up to it.

A slight constraint in her manner, however, led him to fear that it might be so. It pained him exceedingly, but he did not quite see how to refer to it without making matters worse. He hoped the small boy would forget all about it by next day, for he was too young to be reasoned with on the matter.

But little Ranald was not one to forget. He had in some way, no doubt, reasoned out in his small brain that the splendid being who gave him such delight must be in some way a glorified edition of the "Dad—da" who had disappeared, and who, even when he was there, had never been anything like this new one.

And so the next morning, when Angaray was coming up from his bath, he saw the small one dancing excitedly on the threshold of his own house, and salut-

ing him from afar with vociferous cries of "Dad—da!"

He picked the kicking small boy up and held him above his head, and shook him, and said:

"Don't you call me that, young man. Your mother doesn't like it."

And inside the house the mother heard and blushed, for her fear also was lest the man should think she, on her side, had permitted or perhaps even prompted it.

And her manner toward him cooled somewhat, and it made the dark days darker, and the heavy work heavier, and life was not quite what it had been for either of them.

The bad weather lasted with but slight breaks for a full week. Then one morning broke heavenly soft and sweet—the sky unflecked blue again, and the tiny waves of the lagoon rippling in long silvery flashes on the shell beach.

Every member of the colony was out in the sunshine, rejoicing in it after the storm and gloom of the past week.

Barracott had picked up wonderfully during the storm, just as Ericsson had done when he was down with the fever on the *Bluewing*. He was very weak still, but his head was clear, and it was now only a question of building up and recovering strength and tone.

Angaray had spread a rug for him on the sand in front of the house, and he lay there drinking in new life with every breath, and trying to assimilate his surroundings both of place and people.

They had explained things to him bit by bit, as he

could stand them, introducing Ranald and his mother to him, and making clear to him their connection with the island and the wreck on the reef.

The desertion of the crew and their carrying away of the schooner was a bitter pill for him, but Angaray judiciously supplemented it by the story of the discovery of the first of the treasure, and wound up by pouring the contents of the canvas bag into his lap. That kindled his eye again, and raised his spirits to a reasonable level of contentment, and now his mind was sharpening itself on Ericsson's as to the possibility of constructing a craft on the catamaran principle with the help of the two boats, and he was hopeful and almost happy.

"I'm surprised the schooner holds together," said the mate; "must be an uncommonly well built craft. She can't last much longer any way. If there's anything more you want out of her you'd best get it quick, Mr. Angaray."

"I'm going across after breakfast," said Angaray, "to see what damage has been done."

"Will you take us too?" asked Mrs. Brodie, somewhat timidly.

Would he? Would he not! If she had asked him to kindly bring the schooner up to her door, would he not have spent himself in trying?

But he only answered quietly, "With pleasure. Ranald will enjoy the sail."

And after breakfast he ran the *Bluewing's* boat down into the water, stowed Mrs. Brodie and the boy carefully in the stern, and pulled gayly out to the wreck and—the most strenuous struggle of his life.

CHAPTER XV.

FIGHT WITH THE DEVIL.

THEY landed on the reef, and clambered over the sharp coral fangs of it, and so to the schooner.

Angaray swung himself up first, and took Ranald from his mother's hands, and then carefully drew her on board, rejoicing in the close, tight hand-clasp which the operation entailed.

They found that the storm had broken up the stern, and the waves had made a clean sweep into the interior of the ship.

Mrs. Brodie went to the cabin to look round it for the last time. But there was absolutely nothing left to remove. Angaray had been there too often for that. She looked thoughtfully and somewhat sadly at the ruin wrought by man and sea, and they passed on to view the scene of Angaray's herculean labors in the hold and lazarette. It was not much he had left for the greedy sea to gather in, and he was proud of his work. Here they found that the thrashing of the rollers, and the bumping they had given the ship, had torn a great hole in her starboard side—the side which lay on the rocks.

The hold was refreshingly dark after the brilliant blaze of sunshine on deck. The sea glinted and shimmered through the ragged hole in the side, and they climbed down for a rest in the cool darkness.

Little Ranald crawled about and turned things over with his curling pink toes and chubby fingers. A thick piece of flabby bleached rope lay along the floor and disappeared through the hole in the side of the

ship. It commended itself to him as a tempting thing to stand on, and proceeded to do so.

In a moment the bleached rope turned over, curled itself round his plump little leg and body, and apparently by its own weight began slipping through the hole and dragging him toward the sea. He fell to the deck shrieking with terror, and the horrified man and woman saw the little struggling body sliding along the planks toward the hole in the ship's side.

"Mam—ma!—Dad—da!" he shrieked, holding out plaintive arms to them.

"Good God, what is it?" cried Angaray, flinging himself bodily on the bleached rope between the boy and the hole. And then, with a dull-sounding thump that rang through the hollow ship, another sodden, tapering length of bleached rope came sneaking in at the opening—for all the world as though someone on the rocks had flung it violently in. It hit Angaray and curled round him instantly, but instead of falling to the ground it clung to him, gripped him round and round the body, pressed him tighter and tighter in a loathsome, deadly clasp, and began hauling him also toward the opening.

His agonized eyes saw other waving tentacles coming to the assault. He guessed what it was now. He had heard of this most horrible thing, and from the uttermost depths of his despair there was born a great calm.

Mrs. Brodie had remained seated, paralyzed with fear and horror. Angaray's voice—thrilling like an organ bourdon with the tremolo on—and deeper than she had ever heard it before, but with the calmness of death in it—woke her from her stupor.

"Quick! for God's sake!—the ax—there—behind you."

She found it and thrust it into his hand, narrowly evading a clutch from one of the monstrous waving arms.

"Ah! Ah!" it was like the sigh of the pavior bringing down his rammer on the stones.

The ax fell twice on the tough, flabby, leathery arm.

The second blow severed it between Angaray and Ranald. The upper part of the severed arm slackened from the boy's body, and fell writhing and squirming on the deck, and the mother darted in and snatched up her boy in safety.

And, inch by inch, Angaray was dragged toward the opening.

He struck hard and fast at the horrible limb which was dragging him down to perdition, but it was as thick as the upper part of his arm, several of his blows fell off the straight, and the ax went slithering along the hideous skin, wounding the beast but not disabling it.

It had him at the opening. He thought the end had come.

"Good-by!" he cried, "God keep you"; and then his head cleared the hole, and he saw the horror awaiting him down below—nay, climbing slowly up the side of the ship toward him, with its monstrous legs and arms outbranching on every side, and in his agony—

"Oh, God, to die so!" he screamed.

And then the death calm came on him again. He looked down at the thing, at the flaccid impalpableness of its body—its monstrous hawk-beak waiting to rend him in pieces—its eyes—God, what eyes!—surely

the devil himself could not match them—cold, cruel, hungry, remorselessly intelligent, gloating over his agony, careless of everything but the satisfaction of its own devilish appetite.

A sudden fury possessed him. He had to die. That devil down there should die too, if it was possible to kill it. He would rid the world of one devil at all events. And in his demoniac possession he yelled “Hurrah! Have at you, devil!”

Perhaps the monster saw it in his eyes. It began slowly to retreat down the side of the ship, dragging him with it. In the water it would have the advantage. He took a grip of the ax and hurled himself down toward it, the hideous limb still coiling round his body and assisting his descent. Other whirling tentacles were coming to drag him into the devil’s beak. But he was on it—sick—mad—devil-possessed—he struck wildly and furiously at the eyes and beak and the sickening, puffy front of it. Again and again the ax smashing it.

“Devil! Devil! Devil!” he screamed, and smote with the strength of ten, while his left hand sank shuddering into its flabby limbs in the effort to fend them off.

Beak, eyes, puffy front, all were smashed into a heap of filth. The clinging arm relaxed from his body, and writhed with his fellows in shivering tremors on the rocks, and he fell among them as one dead.

Inside the ship, Isobel Brodie, clasping her boy to her heart, listened to the sounds of the struggle outside. She was sick with fear and horror, and when silence fell and all was over,—whatever it was,—it was some time before she could summon courage to

crawl to the opening and peep fearfully through on to the rocks below.

She saw him lying apparently dead amid the hideous remains of the devil-fish, and from her full heart came the cry:

"Oh, my friend, my friend! You have died for me!"

But he was past hearing.

Presently, as soon as her tremblings would let her, she climbed brokenly to the upper deck with Ranald, who was still in a state of shivering terror.

She screamed to the men on shore and waved her arms, and old Ericsson came down to the boat, and launched it, and sculled with an oar over the stern to the ship.

"Why, what's wrong? Where's Mr. Angaray?" he cried.

"Dead! oh, dead! horribly dead! He died to save us."

"Where is he?"

"Round on the other side."

Ericsson stumbled over the coral round the bows of the ship, and came on Angaray lying there with the ax still in his grip. He felt his heart, then slid his whole arm round his body and began dragging him toward the boat.

"Not dead yet," he said, as he drew near the others, "but he's had a close shave, and made a big fight for it. Let's get him ashore. Do you bathe his forehead and I'll get you over."

They got him ashore as quickly as possible, and carried him up to his own house, and stowed him in the mate's bed.

"Been fighting a devil-fish," said Ericsson as they passed the captain; "biggest I ever saw, and it's nearly done for him."

For several days Angaray lay literally sick unto death, loathing food, speech, everything. The very thought of the awful thing—the dead, clammy, putrid-flesh feel of its flabby skin, as his left hand sank into it in shoving it away, while he made play on it with the ax in his right hand—the leech-like clinging of its coiling arms, the vile stench of it, which he could not get out of his nostrils—faugh! it made his stomach shrivel and curl with disgust, and set him retching so that he could keep nothing in him. He felt stained with an indelible, disgusting defilement, and as though he never could feel clean again. Sick and weak as he was, he insisted, many times a day, on crawling down to the beach, and bathing and rubbing himself with sand till his body was like a fresh-boiled lobster, and that unfortunate left hand of contact was raw and bleeding with his drastic efforts at purification.

Mrs. Brodie ministered to him with anxious solicitude. She could never forget that he had gone down to death for the sake of her and her boy—and to a death so hideous and repulsive that no man could have been blamed for refusing it. That the sacrifice had not been consummated was nothing—yea, rather it was everything. Death in such a struggle drew over the loathsome memory of it a merciful veil of forgetfulness. He had lived through it, and the ever-recurring thought of it made life a weariness and a burden. It was but natural that she should try to lighten the burden, and win his mind away from it, for sake of the lives he had given back to her. After her late assump-

tion of coldness her new warmth of friendliness was very sweet to him, and did more to recover him from the nightmare after-effects of the fight than anything she could have done.

One other thing she did for him, trifling in itself, yet grotesquely disproportionate in its effect on his state of bodily and mental languor. She one day handed him with a smile a silver-topped bottle from her dressing-case. It contained a strong preparation of Old English lavender water, and its sweetness and hers, combined, gradually cleansed him from the sense of defilement which had never left him for a moment since his contact on the reef with that incarnation of putrid death.

Gradually he began to feel clean enough to mingle with his fellows again, and in a week he was fairly fit once more; but for months he would start from sleep, suffocating with the pressure of the loathsome arms, and shuddering at the oncoming of the horny beak and the devil's eyes.

Little Ranald was on his feet again the day after his narrow escape, and never gave it another thought, but the mother could not look at her boy without remembering that but for Angaray she would have been childless.

CHAPTER XVI.

MORE DISCOVERIES.

AND now they devoted all their spare time to systematic search for the treasure.

Barracott could cast no light on its hiding place. He accepted Angaray's view that he had himself removed it from its original place of security to others, which commended themselves to his light-headed state as still more secure.

There was nothing for it but a careful thorough sifting of the whole east side of the ridge. So, taking as a starting point the spot where the first bag of gold had been discovered, they marked the surface out in sections, and set to work assiduously turning up the sand to a depth of three feet.

All their spare time was given to the search, and that side of the ridge began to look as though there were at work there a colony of unusually large and active moles—or gravediggers; for to Angaray the long shelving cuttings always looked like a series of newly opened graves.

Each delver cut in where he chose, and tried the spot to the proper depth, and then, disappointed, pitched upon a new one and tried again. It was a great lesson in patience and perseverance, but the weather was delightful, the work was light, and always, just beyond the present point of their endeavor, lay the treasure. Barracott and Angaray worked like navvies, and half the ridge was honey-combed by them, but after all, and in defiance of all

chances, it was Baby Ranald who made the first great find.

He and his mother did their little share in the work with rough spades Angaray had fashioned for them, and one day when Mrs. Brodie had to go back to the house to get the midday meal ready, Ranald elected to stop and work with the other men. She begged Angaray to keep an eye on him, and the small boy wandered round at his heels endeavoring to imitate his dogged activity.

Angaray had finished a trench right up to the ridge, and had left it in disgust to start another a few yards away. Ranald wandered into the vacated cutting, and began delving with his small spade at the extreme end. He made a fine cavern in the soft sand, with the result that presently a sand avalanche came down on top of him and overwhelmed him, and a piercing short-cut scream of "Dad!" cleft the air.

Angaray was in the hole at a bound, and had him by his little pink heels, and dragged him out very red and half suffocated, with his mouth full of sand, and stark naked, for the greedy earth retained his only garment by way of hostage. He was more frightened than hurt, and Angaray wiped the sand out of his mouth and eyes and ears, and the small boy had recovered sufficiently to be angry, and was crying "Bad! Bad!" at the enemy, when the man's eyes lighted on something which the fall of earth had left bare. He dumped Ranald in the sand and sprang up.

One, two, three, four—he could count up to ten—canvas bags bulging out of the backbone of the ridge, and, as he smote them tentatively, they gave out a merry chink.

He stood up and shouted to Barracott working some distance away, and Barracott leaped out of his hole and came running to the long-expected summons.

"The youngster tried to bury himself," said Angaray, as the captain came up, "and there's the result."

"Ha!" cried the captain, "at last! at last!" and he dashed at the bags and began hauling them down into the hole. In all there were nineteen of them—nine thousand and five hundred pounds in golden sovereigns—a very fair morning's work.

They took a bag in each hand and went off to their dinner, with Ranald frisking about, delighted at his nakedness, and equally unconscious of his narrow escape and his great discovery.

There was great jubilation in camp over the find, and it spurred them all to fresh endeavor. But the next discovery was one of another kind, and left a less pleasant flavor in their mouths.

Ericsson, in spite of his single arm, would not be debarred from participation in the treasure hunt. He could not dig, of course, so he procured a long, sharp-pointed stick, and with this he poked and prodded and ferreted about all over the ridge, and attacked the sides and ends of the trenches cut by the others, and left his mark far and wide. It was in the side of one of Barracott's cuttings that he made his find.

Barracott had disgustedly quitted his useless trench, and started on another some distance away, when Ericsson came along and began probing into the sandy sides with his feeler. He felt it strike something hard, and proceeded hopefully to scoop away with his hand the intervening sand. His groping

fingers closed round something. He gave a tug, and fell back with strong language in his mouth and a bone in his hand.

He scooped away energetically, and laid bare the bleached bones of a skeleton. He called to Barracott to bring his shovel, and in ten minutes' work uncovered the whole of the grewsome find—two skeletons, a man's and a woman's—on each bony wrist of the latter a golden bracelet, and lying among the ribs of the man a dozen silver buttons and a steel belt-buckle.

The two men stood looking down on the relics, and wondered who they were, and how they came there, and what their tragic story might have been. Angaray had been hard at work all morning breaking out planks from the wreck. He came up to see how the search was progressing, and, when he saw what the others had unearthed, cast an anxious glance round to make sure that Mrs. Brodie was not in sight, and then they all three sat down on the upturned heap of sand and proceeded to hold an inquest on their predecessors.

"A man and a woman," said Ericsson sententiously, as though the fact of their being together was proof positive that they were no better than they should have been.

"Spaniards, I should think—not Islanders anyhow, from the shape of their heads," suggested Barracott.

"And the woman was young and pretty," said Angaray. "See the little white even teeth. They may have been cast away here, though they would hardly be all alone in that case. Perhaps we shall come across more of them. If they are alone, then I

should say they were marooned here and left to die. A love-story ending in a tragedy. The woman died first and the man buried her. Then, when his time came, he widened the grave and lay down beside her. Lovely and pleasant they may have been in their lives, anyhow in their deaths they were not divided."

"Humph!" grunted Ericsson doubtfully.

"We may as well be charitable, and give them the benefit of the doubt anyhow. Since we can prove nothing against them, we will think no ill of them. I suggest that we bury them in the sea before Mrs. Brodie or the boy sees them."

Ericsson was inclined to hold on to his find, but gave way at last to the views of the others, and they carried the bones carefully down to the jutting rock and dropped them down out of sight.

They were always expecting to come on other bones, but none turned up, and it looked as though these two had had the island all to themselves.

And now the finds of treasure followed quick upon one another. Barracott, to his great delight, struck the next deposit—twenty canvas bags, as in the first case, each containing five hundred sovereigns.

The next lot also fell to his spade and untiring exertions, and now only one lot remained to be discovered, and long and loud did the captain anathematize the crazy wit that had hidden it so cleverly, and imposed such unnecessary labors upon them. However, it had to be found, for Barracott vowed he would never rest easy in his bed or in his grave if that last batch of bags was not turned up. So they delved and groped and probed and ferreted about, till Angaray, coming up from the wreck one day, and finding Bar-

racott in the middle of a trench which he declined to leave until it was finished, took his own spade to pass the time, and digging straight down where he stood, toward the base of the reef, came right on the golden nest with its truly wondrous eggs, which might hatch out such surprising possibilities of life.

And so the tale was complete, and Barracott's soul was satisfied with the fatness of its findings.

They dug a great hole in the floor of their dwelling room and reinterred the treasure, and covered it up, and stamped the sand hard and firm, and then they felt themselves at liberty to think of other things.

CHAPTER XVII.

RANALD HELPS.

THE finding of the treasure wrought curiously on Barracott. It was not that the possession of it made him, for his state in life, a comparatively rich man, though this fact was not without its effects on him. It was not indeed the treasure itself so much as the finding of it that affected him so strongly. For years he had been labeled "crank," and referred to as a man with a bee in his bonnet; and those eighty bags of gold carried forty thousand golden refutations of the libel—forty thousand golden rehabilitations of Jim Barracott in the eyes of his world,—that is of San Francisco,—and in the very shape which would carry most weight, and appeal most strongly.

He got back all the spring and sprightliness of the first few days of the voyage out. He held his head higher and his eye grew brighter. In fact the finding

of the treasure made a new man of him, and all his friends rejoiced with him at the complete vindication of his much-scoffed-at belief in himself and his treasure story.

"I'd give a bag and a half of that gold," he said, "just to see old Jakins's face when I show him it was true all the time."

"It 'd be cheap for us all at the money," said the mate, with quaint emphasis. "We've not got it home yet, captain. All the same I'm mighty glad we've found it, for I know it makes you feel good."

"Never felt better in my life," said Barracott briskly.

Later on Barracott's regeneration impelled him in a direction which caused Angaray no little uneasiness of mind. But in the meantime that happened which forged one more link in the golden chain of circumstance which was gradually and unconsciously binding some of these stranded lives together.

Mrs. Brodie and little Ranald were as salt of the earth to the island community. Without them the three men might have lapsed into mere money-grubbers, perhaps worse. The presence of the woman and the child infused an element of refinement into their daily life, the influence of which was beyond the telling. Their language, their habits, their dress, their whole lives were bounded and elevated by the sweetening and refining presence of this most refined and gracious lady and her bright-eyed boy; and one and all they held her in the highest affection and esteem; while as for little Ranald, the only danger was of their spoiling him completely. He was the pet and darling of them all, but his young affections had centered on

Angaray, and they never swerved, though he ruled all three men with a rod of iron, and twirled them all round his little pink finger.

Since his discovery, on the occasion of his rescue from the gold hole, of the extreme delights of stark nakedness, he could hardly be induced to wear any garment whatever. No sooner was he out of his mother's sight than off would come his little armless shirt, and the little pink-white body with its streaming brown hair was frisking and gamboling about the beach, in and out of the water, rolling in the lip of the tide, gallantly breasting the tiny waves of the lagoon, or squatting on the sand to grub up some curious shell or something still more exciting in the way of wriggling, burrowing little beast, then tearing after "Dad—da" to exhibit the treasure, and being summarily inducted into his single garment the moment his mother caught sight of his nakedness.

He took to the water like a little frog. He never learned to swim. It came to him as naturally as crawling or running.

Angaray, going for his bathe one morning, carried the squirming, slippery little body out with him in his arms, then set his face to the shore and let go his hold, and the small boy leaped from him wallowing and gasping and bubbling, as the water washed over his shining red face, but hurling himself onward with quick-clawing hands and legs as nature taught him to do, and Angaray followed him, laughing and admiring the strenuous workings of the shapely little body and the pluck of the big little soul within.

After that he reveled in the deeper waters, and soon became as expert as he was fearless, and would tumble

about for hours at a time in the tepid lagoon. His white skin became tanned a healthy bronze, and he seemed as strong and sturdy as heart could wish.

But it is possible to have too much even of a good thing, and one day at noon he came crawling up to his mother, crying, like that other little lad of old, "My head, my head!" His mother made him lie down, and when Angaray came in from his work on the wreck with the others, she called him in to look at the boy.

He was lying on the bed, flushed and played out, his head burning and his pulse high, and Angaray said at once:

"He's had a touch of the sun, and it's made him feverish. Will you let me nurse him?"

But that, of course, was the mother's privilege, and she would not hear of surrendering it.

He tossed and wriggled through the long afternoon, and by night was moaning and gabbling incoherently, and the mother's heart was heavy with the great fear.

Angaray wanted to sit up with him, but she would not have it, so he provided her with all likely palliatives which he could lay hands on, and sat down on the sand outside to wait in case he should be needed.

He watched the stars, and he listened to the ripple of the waves on the beach, mingled with the babble of baby talk from the house behind him; and as the long hours passed slowly, inducing the inevitable mood of introspection, it was borne in upon him that this woman and her boy were dearer to him than anything in his life ever had been or could be—dearer than life itself.

He heard the small boy babbling of "Dad—da," and

it made his heart swell. He heard the mother hushing him, and crooning songs to soothe him to sleep, but always, when the song ceased, the babbling talk began again, for the little brain had slipped the brake and the wheels were running free and wild.

In the morning Angaray ran down for a bath, and came up fit and fresh to ask how the small boy was getting on.

The mother looked weary and heavy-eyed, and shook her head.

"He is no better—worse, I fear. He has been rambling all night and calling often for—you."

And the man looked at her with a look so full of sympathy and something more, born of his long night thoughts, that she turned suddenly away with drooping eye and the color momentarily flushing her cheek and neck.

"Won't you come in and look at him?" she asked; and he followed her into her house.

And, as he followed close behind her, the glory of her loose-coiled hair enmeshed his heart and his brain, and his soul leaped out toward her, and it was all he could do to keep from passing his arms round her and drawing her toward him, and crying, "I love you! I love you!"

But he clenched his jaw, and knit his hands, and passed in quietly, and stooped over the small boy.

He was evidently worse. He was in for an attack of fever, and the fever would have to run its course, but careful nursing might pull him through.

"Now, Mrs. Brodie," said Angaray, in a quiet, level voice, "you cannot manage him both day and night. That means you yourself breaking down next. I am

a capital fever-nurse. I nursed all the men on board, and we had it pretty bad. I shall take the night work, and you the day. We'll pull him through all right. Pray don't lose heart; it's only a question of time and careful nursing."

And, sooner than look him in the face again just then, she let him have his way.

Angaray made up a couch for her in the kitchen, and night after night he sat in her place in her own house, amid all her intimate personal surroundings, which sang to him of her, and brought her nearer to him, and fanned the flame of his love for her.

The days passed, and the nights, and the little fellow had a close and trying time of it. He cried incessantly for "Dad—da," and the touch of Angaray's hand on wrist or forehead did more to soothe him than anything else.

Barracott and Ericsson proffered their services, but Angaray held the post of honor, and he would not share it.

At last the corner was turned, the fever had left him, and all the little patient had to do was to pick up his strength again. But it left him a very different Ranald from the brown-skinned, sturdy little naked islander who crawled up to the house that first night of his sickness. He had grown considerably, his face was white, his long locks shorn, his arms and legs like pipe stems, so fierce and wasting had been the grip of the fever. But he was there still, and that was everything, and the rest was only a matter of time and building up again.

And the mother's heart was grateful to God—and to Angaray.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

THE three men gave themselves up now to the work of dismantling the wreck, and saving every plank, rope, and bolt that might be of service in the construction of the catamaran: for the season of storms was before them, and it was astonishing that the ship had held together so long as she had. Among other things Barracott unearthed a pitch pot and a quantity of pitch and oakum, things which had never commended themselves to Angaray as worth the trouble of taking over, but which from the captain's point of view were invaluable.

One afternoon Angaray had just finished lashing together a quantity of planks and attaching them to the boat, when he noticed Barracott sitting astride of the extreme point of the broken bowsprit, which was the most elevated part of the ship. He was gazing earnestly seaward, screwing up his eyes and shading them with his hand.

"Hello, captain, anything in sight?" he called up.

"Come and see if you can see anything."

"Where away?" asked Angaray, as he swung up alongside.

The captain pointed—"I thought I caught a flicker of something right down on the skyline there."

Angaray peered in the direction indicated, but could see nothing.

"No such luck, I'm afraid," he said cheerfully: for he was just as happy as the day was long, and for him any change must be for the worse.

"Maybe it was only the sun on a wave," said the captain, and they went on with their work; but Angaray noticed him, whenever he stopped for a rest, still looking at that same spot in an unsatisfied way.

When they returned after dinner, the captain brought with him the telescope which Angaray had taken ashore among his other plunder. And before setting to work he climbed up on the bowsprit again, and looked carefully out over the horizon, while Angaray watched him eagerly.

"Yes, it's there right enough," said Barracott, "I thought I could not be mistaken. Look for yourself."

Angaray looked till his eye ached, and vowed there was nothing but sea and sky, when suddenly his maneuvering brought within the compass of the disk a tiny fleck of white; it was gone in a moment, and he could not find it again.

"I caught something for a second, or thought I did," he said, still ogling with the glass, "but I can't get it again."

"It's there all the same. It's the topsail of a ship, and she's coming this way. Perhaps we'd best say nothing to the others till we are sure of her."

He turned to, and put in a good hour's hard work, and when next they looked the white square sail was visible like a small pocket handkerchief against the sky.

"We'll make a flare and a smudge to give them no excuse for not seeing us," he said. "If nothing comes of it we can tell them on shore that we were burning some rubbish. I'll wink at Ericsson, and he'll understand. No good raising Mrs. Brodie's hopes till we're quite sure she's coming this way."

So they made a big stack of useless timber and set fire to it, and then piled on sodden ropes and rubbish of all kinds, and a great balloon of gray-black smoke soared up into the clear still air.

"It's a mighty big chance if she's coming our way," said Barracott, using Ericsson's exact words. "I never expected anything coming here except by accident. I reckoned if any saving was to be done we'd have to do it ourselves."

They kept looking for the sail, but it did not seem to get any nearer, and at last they lost it altogether.

"It's gone," said Angaray, in an ill-disguised tone of relief.

Barracott glanced curiously at him, and said, "Or else they've hauled it down. Would you mind bringing Ericsson over, Mr. Angaray? Say I want his advice about some things here."

And Angaray, wondering, rowed ashore and brought the mate back with him.

They found the captain pacing a possible bit of the reef with thoughtful face and knitted brow.

"Ericsson," he said, "there is a topsail schooner hanging about out there. No, you can't see her," as the mate glanced quickly round the horizon. "They hauled down their sails when they saw our smudge. What do you make of that?"

The captain looked at the mate, and the mate looked mystified.

Then, with a charred stick from the fire, Barracott drew a rough design on a plank.

"The fore-topsail, the one we saw, is like that!" and he looked fixedly at the mate.

"God!" said he, looking sharply at the captain, the blood filling his face and neck as he spoke, "that's the *Bluewing!*"

"Exactly!" said Barracott, "and what's she coming back for?"

"For no good," said the mate.

"The treasure," said Angaray.

"Exactly!" said the captain. "Now we know where we are, and what we've got to do, and, by God, we'll do it!"

"Their plan is to hang off and on out there till night," he went on, "then creep in as near as they can, come ashore in their boat, and try to surprise us. We'll make things hot for them, or my name's not Jim Barracott. Now, Mr. Angaray, what do you advise?"

"The only thing to decide is, where's the best place to fight."

"Yes."

Angaray looked over toward the shore. He saw Mrs. Brodie sitting at the door of her house, and little Ranald rolling about on the sand, and his blood ran cold at the thought of this fresh peril.

"Why not right here, captain? Take them un-awares as they go through the passage."

"Right!" said the mate, "that's the plan."

"Yes," said Barracott, "that is what I was going to propose."

"We'll get the two rifles over, and some provisions, and make ourselves snug here, and if they try to run through the reef we'll pot them like pigeons. If you'll stop here and keep a look out," he added to the mate, "we'll bring over all we want. We'll miss your arm

in the shooting. You'll have to do the best you can with a revolver."

"Aye, aye!" said Ericsson grimly. "I'm thinking something out, I'll have it all clear by the time you are back. You bet your life, captain, somebody's going to pay for this to-night;" and he tapped his stump with his right hand.

Barracott and Angaray paddled across at once. They put some provisions together, and got out the two Winchesters and a supply of cartridges and three revolvers, and they quietly informed Mrs. Brodie of the reason of their preparations.

She turned pale and looked round for her boy, and then began hastily gathering some things together. Barracott saw her intention.

"I think you would be safer ashore here, Mrs. Brodie," he said. "We may have rough work out there!"

"Oh, no, no! You must not leave us behind. Take us with you—please!" and she laid a beseeching hand on Angaray's arm.

"I think she is right, captain," he said, "a division of forces will only add to our anxiety. If we all keep together we shall know all that's going on."

"Very well, only remember I advised against it. Will you make a kettle of tea for us, Mrs. Brodie? We shall have a long watch, and nothing tastes better than cold tea, when you can't get it hot."

The tea was soon made and the kettle carried steaming down to the boat. Mrs. Brodie carried away with her the writing-case containing her papers, and Ranald gamboled along by her side, delighting in the novel picnic. Angaray and the captain loaded them-

selves with the firearms and provisions, then taking the other boat in tow they pulled out to the reef.

They found Ericsson perched comfortably astride of the bowsprit.

"Seen any more of her?" asked Barracott.

"Nary glimpse," said the mate; and, with a quizical look at the captain, "Sure you saw that sail, captain?"

"You saw it too," said Barracott to Angaray.

"Yes, I saw it, but I couldn't say anything as to its shape or what it was."

The mate nodded.

"That's all right, captain, they're coming. I can feel it here;" and he looked down at his stump. "It's been tingling and shooting like the very devil ever since you said *Bluewing*. Something tells me the man that did that's coming for his pay."

"I doubt if he'll come," said Angaray, "I think I finished him. He got two barrels of my revolver in his face anyhow."

"And you never told me," said the mate. "I'd have felt ever so much better if I'd known."

"You never asked me," said Angaray.

"See here, captain, I've been thinking——"

"Made your head ache, I guess," said Barracott, by way of return for the mate's query as to the actuality of his sight of the distant sail.

"Not as bad as it 'll make somebody else's ache if I can put it through. Here's my idea. It 'll be a black night, no moon, and it's not easy to shoot to kill in the dark, 'specially when the mark's on the move. There's an old length of chain cable in the hold here. I propose running it across the mouth of the channel

there, just under water. Ten to one, it 'll capsize 'em. If not, it's bound to stop 'em long enough to give you a chance to plug 'em. Then, as it 'll be as black as a hat, I'm going to make a spit-fire—you know the thing, a Vesuvius we used to call it when we were kids. If any man knows how to make a Vesuvius it's me, and I'll never make a better than I'll make this night, nor with more pleasure in the making, seeing the work it's got to do."

He proceeded to touch-off a miniature fire-devil, which he had made with a pinch of powder treated by his own special secret process, greatly to the edification of little Ranald, who immediately demanded more.

"I'll make it big enough to make 'em think this old island's gone bust, and I'll fix it on that arm of the horseshoe there, and lie down among the bowlders, and fire it when I hear 'em cussing that chain, and I'll play into them with my revolver at the same time. I'll be ten times more use there than here. Can't handle a Winchester with only one arm, but I bet I'll spoil some of them with the revolver."

"Where's your powder?"

"There's a small keg in the corner of the lazarette—for signals likely. We found it, Mr. Angaray and I, rooting round one day, but left it here for fear of accidents ashore, and 'cause we had no use for it."

"Go ahead. The idea's a good one. We're going to lick them right out of creation."

"Is there no chance of their having come back to rescue us?" ventured Mrs. Brodie timidly.

"We'll soon know when we see and hear them," said the captain. "If they come on like philan-

thropists we'll receive them kindly. If they don't we'll shoot first and inquire why they came afterward. But if they wanted they could have been here by this time, or close up anyway."

CHAPTER XIX.

EXPECTED VISITORS.

THE sun sank, the last softly glowing after-rays faded and left the sky gray and cold, and the wind came steady off the sea with a chill in it, but not a sign of their anticipated visitors could they see.

Mrs. Brodie carried the reluctant Ranald into the shelter of the hold, with a shudder at the recollection of her last visit there, and a wary eye for bleached ropes. Ericsson was busy compounding his giant Vesuvius. Barracott and Angaray hauled out the chain cable and fixed it across the channel a few inches under water, wedging the ends in among the coral spurs with marlinspikes.

Then they all gathered in the hold for a supper of tinned meat and biscuit and cold tea, and the consumption of tobacco according to their various ideas, and fell into desultory talk.

"Is there no fear of their creeping in unawares?" asked Angaray.

"They're not likely to come in till after midnight. They don't want any fight if they can do without it. Creep in and catch us sleeping, and no risk to their own skins, is about their size," said the mate, yawning. "All the same I wish they'd come. Waiting's a sight harder work than fighting."

"That's so," said Barracott. "I remember in the war waiting a whole day for a regiment of Rebs to attack us. If they'd come on in the morning we'd have eaten them alive, but before night the spunk had all run out of us, and we were mighty glad they'd thought better of it and didn't come at all."

But by degrees the desire for talk lapsed, and a heavy pregnant silence fell on them. Mrs. Brodie was dozing fitfully, with Ranald in her arms and her head against the side of the ship.

The three men went quietly on deck, and leaned over the bulwarks, listening for any indication of the approach. But there was nothing to be heard but the incoming roar and the hissing retreat of the waves on the coral.

It was dreary, dismal, unnerving work—standing there, straining eyes and ears into the gloom, with the certainty of bloody work ahead, and no telling how soon.

At midnight Ericsson whispered:

"They can't be long now. It's time I was over there."

They carried his fire-devil, like a great conical black hat in a half keg, down to the boat, and paddled him quietly across to the further arm of the horseshoe, placed it in the position he wanted on a boulder in a line with the chain, and then wrung his hand and left him.

"Revolver all right?" whispered the captain, as he turned away.

"You bet!"

"Then God bless you!"

"Same to you, captain. We'll drill holes in 'em."

Angaray and Barracott pulled silently back to the wreck and climbed up to their posts.

The minutes passed like hours. The hours seemed endless, the night an eternity—every nerve and faculty strained to its fullest—every next moment looming big with all the possibilities and horrors of deadly strife.

But the night wind sighed on mournfully, and the breakers roared and hissed, and nothing disturbed their dreary vigil, and Angaray began to think that the sun had forgotten to rise, and that they had struck a period of eternal night. But at last the east lightened, and the new day dawned, and they eyed one another with surprised satisfaction.

“It hasn’t come off,” said Angaray. “What’s the meaning of it, captain?”

Barracott knitted his brows, and shook his head, and scanned the sea all round carefully.

“We’d better get Ericsson over, and then all get ashore. I want to get up to the ridge there, to have a look all round.”

Mrs. Brodie’s face appeared out of the hold. She looked weary, but satisfied.

“They never came?” she said. “Thank God! perhaps they’ve changed their minds and gone back!”

“For their own sakes, as well as ours, I hope they have,” said Angaray. But the captain said nothing.

She passed Ranald up to them and they helped her on deck, and they all went down to the boat.

They rowed across for Ericsson, and found him stamping his blood into circulation, and much put out at the uninteresting quietude of the night.

"Well, I'm darned, captain!" he said remonstratively. "You're quite sure, now, it was a sail you saw?"

"Yes, I'm quite sure, and the cunning devils are waiting out there. It was a mistake to make that smudge. It told them we'd sighted them, and would be on the lookout. They'll try to make us think it was only a passing ship, and they'll wait till they think we're off guard. No need to feel sulky about it, old man! You'll get your fight all right, but it may not be to-night or to-morrow. All the same we'll have to be ready for them. I'm going up to the ridge there to make sure they've not crept round to that side in the night. Then, if there's no signs of them, I advise everyone getting what sleep they can. We'll want our eyes skinned every night till they've been—and gone, if we let any of them go."

The advice was good, and they followed it, Ericsson alone expressing his feelings by a doubtful shake of the head. It was decided that one should keep watch on the ridge while the others slept, and Barracott took the glass and strode away to take first spell.

They watched him scan the horizon all round carefully, then he seated himself on the crown of the ridge with the telescope across his knees, and they turned in to take their watch below.

"What do you think about it, Ericsson?" asked Angaray, as he flung himself on his bed. "Is it all a mistake?"

The mate looked at him for a moment musingly, and then shook his head.

"I don't know," he said, "I hope not. The captain's in his right mind, so far as I can see, and he's a

mighty smart man when he is. But I wish they'd turned up. My dead hand 'll give me no peace till I've made somebody pay for it."

Four hours later Ericsson relieved the captain, and was in turn relieved by Angaray, who felt mightily refreshed by his long spell off duty.

And so, with the regularity of clock-work, they took their turns on the ridge with the telescope, and all day long not an inch of the horizon but was scanned closely and eagerly, with hopes and fears according to who happened to be at the narrow end of the glass.

They found it impossible to settle to any of their usual avocations. They ate and drank and slept, and took their spells on the ridge, but an electric suspense held them all in its grip, and their nerves were strung as tense as fiddle-strings.

Each night at dusk they gathered together their arm and provisions, made a kettle of tea, and rowed across to the wreck, dropping the mate on the northern spit of the horseshoe as they passed. He now took the precaution to provide himself with oil-skins and a rug, for the nights were chill. His fire-devil he tended carefully and worshiped daily, keeping it religiously covered from the vulgar gaze and from wind and weather, and each night offering it incense in the shape of a pinch of fresh priming, so that it would go off with a touch.

They did not speak much among themselves at this time. There was only one thing to speak about, and all that could be said about it had been said over and over again.

The strain began to tell upon them all except little Ranald, and many a fervent "D——n! Why don't

they come?" was offered up by the three weary watchers.

"They're trying to tire us out," said Barracott, "and time is of no consequence to them."

"It might be for some of 'em," said Ericsson. "It 'll end for them the moment they cant on that chain."

When the fourth day passed, and still no sign of the raiders, even Barracott began to doubt if he must not have been mistaken.

"And yet I know I saw it," he said.

And the mate tapped his stump significantly, and said, "And my barometer's low yet too; there's a storm brewing, captain."

Little Ranald gamboled about the beach all day long, as was his wont, clad in his single little armless garment, which started below his neck and ended above his knees, and was girt about the waist with a cord. He was in and out of the water like a Newfoundland puppy, turning up curiosities with his curling pink toes, and examining them with gleeful shouts and the self-prattle of lonely childhood, galloping with them for his mother's inspection, and racing up the ridge yelling for "Dad—da," the moment he saw Angaray on duty.

So for four whole days they lived on the keen knife-edge of expectancy, and it began to tell upon them in various ways. Barracott became gloomy and sulky at the slur cast on his veracity and acumen by the non-arrival of the enemy. Ericsson grew savagely ill-tempered and would hardly stand being spoken to. He and the captain had by this time almost changed places in their view of matters. The captain was

gloomy enough to be ready to admit that he might after all have been mistaken. Ericsson, on the other hand, whenever the matter was mentioned, tapped his wounded stump and swore that they were coming. Angaray's feeling simply was that the previous state of matters had been entirely satisfactory to him, that he did not want a fight, but was ready for it if it came, but if it had to come, he wished it would come quickly and get done with.

So the hours were leaden-footed and the days dragged wearily, while the nights were nerve-breaking in their ceaseless strain, and never the flicker of a sail rewarded their untiring vigil. But, in spite of all their weariness, not for one single instant was one jot of their wariness abated.

Throughout the heat and blaze of the day they re-couped, as far as they could, the waste of the night, and at dusk each evening they took up their various posts on wreck and reef, and kept strenuous, narrow-eyed, ear-strained, finger-on-trigger watch for what they variously expected, and feared, and hoped might turn up.

The fourth night came and with it the end, and none too soon, for the strain was becoming insupportable. Mrs. Brodie was in her usual corner in the hold, nursing the small boy to sleep. They had begged her to stop ashore, so remote seemed the prospect of trouble, but she insisted that if the possibility was enough to necessitate their being at their posts, her place was there too, and she would not feel safe ashore.

It was about midnight, dark as a pit, but with little wind and less noise than usual of the wash and hiss of the surge on the reef. Angaray was leaning over the

bulwarks trying to keep awake, when Barracott suddenly gripped his arm, as he had done once before, with a clutch so fierce that it seemed like to burst the skin.

"Look!" he whispered.

On the ridge behind them there glowed a steady round speck of light. It was gone in a second.

"What is it?" whispered Angaray, startled.

"A signal. A party has landed at the back of the island. That's to tell the others to come in. Now keep your eyes and ears open. Rifle ready? When the flare goes, give it them for all you're worth, and don't funk; it's their lives or ours. God! I hope Ericsson is on the *quee vee!*"

"Listen!"

A low, regular, metronomic beat to seaward,—almost inaudible,—a slightly louder pulsation than the wash of wave on reef,—in faster time and in a different key.

"Boat coming in!" murmured the captain.

But they could see absolutely nothing—only hear. Then came a light coarse laugh—instantly, apparently violently, checked, and a smothered curse.

"Not much Christian philanthropy about them, is there?" whispered Barracott.

The sounds told them that the boat was making cautiously for the opening in the reef.

Then in a moment the long pending cloud burst in a fury of blasphemous yells and execrations. At the same instant Ericsson's fire-devil flamed up, hissing and spitting and belching volcanic showers of fire. The boat was well on the chain, it canted half over, and the crew pitched headlong in a ruck into the stern,

and the mate's revolver was playing on them point-blank at close range.

Barracott and Angaray opened fire, Angaray resting his Winchester on the side of the ship to steady his jumping nerves, Barracott shooting quick and straight from the shoulder.

For the space of three minutes the black night was yellow and blue, with fire and smoke and blasphemy, and then—silence. The boat, riddled with bullets, dropped slowly off the chain and sank, and not one of her crew was left. Never was so clean and sweeping a victory, never was long expectation so thoroughly justified.

"Now ashore for the others," said Barracott, blazing with excitement. "Mrs. Brodie must stop here, there is no more danger from this side, but there may be plenty ashore."

They explained the situation to her as briefly as possible, and she acquiesced.

"Leave me your revolver," she said, white-faced and nervous, to Angaray.

He put it into her hand, and clasping it and the boy, she crept back to her dark corner of the hold in fear and trembling.

The two men pulled rapidly across the lagoon for Ericsson, and then were making straight for the beach.

"Steady, captain," whispered the mate, "they'll be expecting us there. Best land on the spit here and creep along till we find out what they're up to."

The advice was good, and the captain turned the boat's nose to the spit from which they had just started. They landed noiselessly, and crept from

bowlder to bowlder toward the ridge, and when they reached the end of the spit, where it began to jut out from the land, they chose shelter and lay down on their stomachs to await the dawn and what it might bring.

They lay there silent and motionless, eyes and ears straining after any sound or movement where all should be silence and stillness—till the night grew old and gray, and the eastern sky softened and glimmered with the dawn; and at last the new day shot up behind the ridge, and they shrunk small behind their shelters, and made ready to repel the assault. Still no sign from the ridge, and still they crouched motionless, wary of giving the first sign to their opponents.

Suddenly Ericsson sprang up with a shout, and stamped and swore and pointed behind them. The schooner was stretching away out to sea under full sail, and so, after all, though a tremendous rout, it was only half a victory. For the captain and the mate had set their hopes on recovering their ship, and she was away beyond all possibility of capture. The appalling disaster at the reef had evidently impressed the other half of the surprise party with a wise discretion in favor of whole skins and future operations.

So ended the raid, and the island was still inviolate and the treasure still intact; but Barracott and Ericsson remained for many days in a state of profound and sulky disappointment, and then turned dejectedly to their work on the catamaran.

CHAPTER XX.

WHY DON'T YOU SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, JOHN?

IT must have been about a month after the raid, the nights were getting colder and longer, and when the day's work was over the men had got into the habit of sitting over the fire in the kitchen. And sometimes they yarned, and Barracott and Ericsson had many marvelous tales of the sea to tell, and sometimes, to their great enjoyment, Mrs. Brodie read to them from one or other of the books Angaray had brought ashore from the wreck. She read excellently well. Her voice was sweet and full of expression. Those nights over the spurting blue and yellow flames of the sea-seasoned wood fires, with the silence of the grave outside, the distant wash of the surf on the reef only deepening the silence on land, and the three men hanging on, eye and ear, to every tone of her voice and every play of expression on her face—those nights were never forgotten by any of them.

Angaray and Barracott were sitting so one night. Mrs. Brodie had been reading "Hiawatha" to them, and had bidden them good-night and gone off to her own house, where Ranald had long since been sleeping the sleep of a tired healthy boy. He was quite strong again, and enjoyed life almost as much as ever, except that he no longer went about stark naked. Ericsson had also grunted his good-night and gone off to bed; Angaray and Barracott were left alone.

For some time past Angaray had noticed a change in his friend, and was much puzzled by it.

The captain's elevation of spirits at the finding of

the treasure had toned down; in fact for some days he had been distinctly below par. He had been unusually silent and thoughtful—reserved almost, and Angaray could not account for it. It almost seemed as though the treasure had not fulfilled his expectations, or else the difficulties of getting it home were growing upon him. He worked all day in silence unless spoken to, and rambled off by himself at times, and sat over the fire at night pondering things in his mind; but what things, and why, was quite beyond the others.

Angaray wondered much but forbore to question him, and looked to time to loosen his tongue. And this night, as they two sat by the fire alone, the captain unchained his tongue and unloaded his mind.

“Yon’s a very sweet woman,” he said, breaking silence so suddenly that Angaray started.

“Yes.”

“What’s her age, do you think?”

“I’ve no idea?”

“I shouldn’t think she’s more than twenty-six.”

“I’m sure I can’t say.”

The discussion smacked of sacrilege to Angaray, and he could not imagine what the captain was driving at.

“She was a sight too good for yon poor thing that died,” said the captain, after a thoughtful pause.

“Maybe! Most women are a sight too good for the men that get them.”

“That’s so!” said the captain emphatically. And after another reflective pause, he added, “And that’s as it should be. If a man marries a woman below him he comes down to her level. If he marries a woman better than himself he works up to her.”

Angaray nodded. He did not see any special point in the discussion. But Barracott's next words startled him.

"How soon do you suppose she'll think of marrying again?"

"Good heavens, man! how do I know? Better ask her."

"I'm going to, but I thought maybe you could advise me how to go about it."

Angaray glared at him open mouthed.

"Is this a joke, captain, or are you in earnest?"

"Dead," said the captain laconically.

"Well, I'm afraid—I can't advise you in the matter. Have you any reason for thinking Mrs. Brodie is inclined to marry again?"

"No—o!" said Barracott, "no special reason, 'cept that she's all alone, and it's natural she should want somebody to look after her and the boy, and I don't suppose her husband left her overwell provided for. I'm fairly well off now, you see, and she's the sweetest woman I ever met."

"Why, man alive, I made her husband's will that night before he died. You were in the fever at the time, so you knew nothing about it. He left her all his fortune—over two hundred thousand pounds—more than a million dollars."

"That so?" said the captain, somewhat abashed. Then, after a musing pause—"Well, all the better for me if she'd think of it. She couldn't say it was her money I was after. I wanted her before I knew she'd a cent to her name, and you could bear witness to it. Say!" he said, after another thoughtful lapse, "why shouldn't you put in a word for me,

Mr. Angaray? You and she are very good friends!"

Angaray looked at him, but the captain's return look was one of simple, eager hopefulness. Apparently it had never entered his head that Angaray himself might entertain similar feelings toward Mrs. Brodie. Angaray eyed him keenly. The thought flashed across his mind for a moment that it was this very idea that had induced the captain to open his mind to him, and thus, so to speak, put his prior claim on record. But he felt sure in his own mind that such subtle diplomacy was quite beyond Barracott's guileless nature.

He shook his head and said, "No, I could not do that. You must fight your own battles, captain, and do your own asking."

Angaray tossed and tumbled over this matter all night long, and rose in the dim dawn unrefreshed and troubled. He threw on his things and went off along the beach for a lonely bathe. Early as it was, little Ranald was on foot and ran to join him. But Angaray sent him back, saying:

"Not to-day, laddie, I want to do some thinking."

"Anal fink too."

"All right, my son, you go and fink by yourself just now, and I'll come back soon, and you'll tell me what you've been finking about"; and he went on alone, while Ranald went back disconsolate, to inform his mother that "Dad—da had gone to fink," and Mrs. Brodie wondered what great thing her friend was thinking out.

Perhaps her quick woman's wit came near the mark when Angaray, during the day, asked her to read them

"The Courtship of Miles Standish" that night, as the captain had never heard it, and he thought he would enjoy it. For Angaray had gone away along the beach that morning, kicking up the shells and bits of coral, and snorting out an occasional laugh that was half amusement and half anger, and he flung himself down on the sand at last, and sat pondering the matter.

He loved Isobel Brodie,—who had no right to the name, though not a soul on earth knew it save himself, and she must never know it,—loved her with his whole heart and soul. And who was he that he should love a pure-minded woman? Who was he that he should stand in the light of a better man than himself? A man whose hands and soul, at all events, were not stained with murder. Alas and alas! Was that hideous body of death to weigh him down for ever and ever? Was there no escape, no redemption? He would not believe it. That girl at Richmond, on the edge of death, had said there was a way. McCaskie, with his eyes looking death in the face, had hinted the same. He lay on the shells and thought many thoughts, and rose up at last, comforted, and with his mind made up.

He would do nothing to stop the captain's suit, though it commended itself to him as simply preposterous. He should have fair play, but all the same he would bring it home to his innocent mind that simple Jim Barracott was not the only man in the world, nor Isobel Brodie the only woman whose sweetness set many hearts aflame. And the appositeness of the story of Miles Standish commended itself to him as the one way in which to do it.

And so, that night, she read to them the delightful story of the tongue-tied Puritan captain, and the laughing-eyed maiden Priscilla, and the silver-voiced youth, John Alden.

And as she read the last words of the " Lover's Errand "—" Why don't you speak for yourself, John? " the thought in her mind which was barely a thought—a dim shadowy seedling of thought, a mere intuition—made her glance up at the faces round her.

Angaray's eyes were fixed on her with an unwavering look of preternaturally innocent enjoyment. As a matter of fact it was only by the greatest exertion that he could refrain from glancing at Barracott.

The captain's wild dark eyes were fixed on her also, his mouth was a little bit open to drink in every word, but, in the fraction of a second which her up-glance occupied, she saw him shoot a quick, suspicious look at the unconscious Angaray, and she saw him swallow something in his throat.

She turned the page hastily and read on, vaguely conscious of the meaning of things.

She read the poem through, and wished them good-night, and left them, and pondering the matter through the night she arrived at a very close estimate of the truth. That Angaray loved her she knew, of course, though he had honestly endeavored to make no display of his feelings toward her. But that the captain should entertain a similar feeling had never entered her head, and the thought of the complications which the matter might cause in their circumscribed circle filled her mind with anxiety.

She could do nothing, however. But her manner became somewhat more constrained toward both men ;

and Angaray, at all events, perfectly understood the reason, and did his best to assist her in the trying situation by taking no notice of it, though the dimming of the sunshine of her friendliness was as the shadowing of the golden path that had seemed like to bring his soul a little nearer to its peace.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DEFAULT OF THE MEAT TINS.

ANGARAY wondered much what view Barracott would take of the matter. Would he turn nasty, or would he accept the situation quietly and sensibly? He knew the man well enough by this time to recognize that at bottom he was simple, straightforward, and fairly well balanced in mind and disposition. The strange, wild aberrations of the outward voyage he could forgive and extenuate. Nature, or Chance, or Providence had played into his hands in a way that might well have upset any man's brain, and anyhow it had brought them, and in truly marvelous fashion, to the island and the treasure, and to—Isobel Brodie. For that he could forgive any man anything.

He had perceived, by some uncatalogued sixth sense, the captain's quick suspicious glance at himself when Mrs. Brodie read the words of the Puritan Maiden to John Alden, and he knew just what thought was in the captain's mind, though his own eye was fixed on the reader and never wavered from her face. He preferred, however, not to refer to the matter in any way, but to wait quietly and see how things worked out.

If twenty-five per cent. of the adult population of the island put itself into opposition to the rest, of course things might become unpleasant. But he had faith in the captain's good common sense, and so he kept an innocent face and a quiet tongue.

Barracott devoted himself to his work on the catamaran with a tight-lipped persistency that was exceedingly beneficial to the Construction Department. For a week he scarcely opened his lips, to the great alarm of the mate, who feared he was sickening for some new illness, or he knew not what. But the captain chopped and sawed and hammered with so true and deft and decisive a hand—as though the senseless wood were the body of a foe—that Ericsson took comfort to himself that, whatever was troubling the captain's mind, his body was all right, and he was putting in some real hard work toward their salvation. No more late night lingerings over the pleasant wood fires, for the captain. He worked hard and late, until he could no longer see, then ate his supper and turned in at once, leaving Mrs. Brodie and Angaray to the companionship of the dancing flames and their own two selves.

When Barracott went away the first night, they waited for his return, but he did not come.

"Is the captain not coming back?" asked Mrs. Brodie.

"I don't know," replied Angaray, and for a second his eyes held hers in a glance of half-veiled understanding. "Won't you go on reading?" he said, as he saw her hesitating. "If the captain has a headache, that's no reason why the sweets of life should be denied to the rest of us."

She hesitated still, and he loved her the more for it. Then into her mind there came the recollection of all this man had done for her, and she took up the book and read as he wished. And he lay and listened and looked at her, and wished he could lie and listen and look to all eternity.

Barracott never said a word to him on the subject, nor ever referred to it again, except once—and once again. But that came later. As a matter of fact, the unexpected news of Mrs. Brodie's wealth cut from under his feet the ground on which his chief hopes had been based. It elevated her on a golden pinnacle, which put matters on a very different footing; and being now in his right mind and possessed of good sound common sense, he was wise enough to accept the situation quietly, and work out his feelings on the building of the catamaran. And so by degrees the captain recovered his equanimity, though for a time he fought shy of being alone with Angaray, as though he feared some reference to the matter, than which nothing was further from Angaray's thoughts.

Another matter, and a vital one, suddenly engaged all their attention, and filled them with grave and perpetual anxiety. Angaray—coming up from the sea one morning, rosy and fresh, and glowing with the tonic of the crisp air and the salt water—found Barracott and Ericsson standing by the table in the kitchen, with faces knitted and pinched with anxious foreboding.

They looked up at him as he came in, but did not speak.

“Hello, what's up?” he asked cheerfully. If some-

thing had gone wrong, all the more reason why he should try and brighten the proceedings.

The mate pointed with mute eloquence to a newly opened tin of meat which stood on the table, and as Angaray bent inquisitively toward it a smell like to the too-well-remembered smell of devil-fish met him half-way.

"Phew?" he blew the smell and the remembrance away—"bad?"

"Rotten," said the mate, "stinking rotten, and every tin we find like it is a day off our lives."

"That's so," said Barracott, with a gloomy nod.

"Good heavens! And do you suppose there are more like it?"

"May be all like it, for all we can tell. It looked all right outside."

"We'd better go into the rest at once and see what like it is."

"We can't, don't you see. It won't keep more than a day when it's opened, and every tin we open is a tin less in stock, and we can't order in a fresh supply."

"How much is there left?"

"About enough for six months if it's all good. If it's all like that, our time's short."

"We can spin it out with fish."

"The fish don't come as they used to, and the bad weather's before us, and there'll be less still."

Angaray whistled. Then he picked up the treacherous tin and said:

"Best say nothing to Mrs. Brodie about it. I'll give this to the fishes. You try another and see how it turns out."

He carried the tin down to the lagoon, and emptied

its contents there, and when he returned, Mrs. Brodie and Ranald and the rest were busy at work on the contents of the next tin, which had turned out all right.

But from that time on, this matter hung over them like a cloud. The next tin the captain opened all by himself in the storeroom was rotten, and went to feed the fishes; and each morning thereafter the visit to the larder possessed all the excitement of a gamble, and the stake was a day of their lives, added on or taken off. "*Rouge et noir!*—heads or tails—right or rotten!—*Faites le jeu, Messieurs et Mesdames!*—*faites le jeu!*"—and with grim foreboding Angaray looked forward to the time when the croupier, whose name is Death, should close the deal with the fateful "*Rien ne plus!*"

At last, learning by experience, they came to recognize the most flagrant defaulting, even without opening them, by the bulginess of their ends. In many cases, however, this was so little apparent that they found themselves deceived, and opening a tin they had reckoned as good, they found it sour.

The full significance of this unexpected calamity quickened and concentrated all their labors on the catamaran, and what with Barracott's dogged application, consequent on his never-alluded-to disappointment, and the perpetual spur arising from the treachery of the meat tins, the work went on apace. They were none of them shipbuilders, nor even carpenters, and their tools and material were only such as they had been able to rescue from the wreck, and in the eyes of a professional their progress might have been accounted as slow as its results were crude. But the uncouth contrivance, born of their needs, and limited

by their lack of many things necessary, was taking very definite shape, and to the non-nautical members of the community its safety and its utility were on a par with its grace and beauty. In a word, Barracott and Ericsson were the only ones who fancied the looks of it, and even the mate's most exuberant and hopeful estimate of their handiwork did not go further than that "he reckoned it might do."

Mrs. Brodie shivered whenever she looked at it, and she shuddered at thoughts of traversing a couple of thousand miles of ocean on it. More than once she hinted that she considered it a direct tempting of Providence for anyone to think of putting to sea on it, and that she would prefer the lonely stability of the island to the precarious companionship of the catamaran.

They had, however, never told her of the discovery of the rotten meat, and of the absolute necessity of preparing for a move.

Angaray was much exercised in his mind. The craft looked suitable enough for smooth waters, but for weather such as he had already experienced in these seas, the idea of being afloat in her simply appalled him. On the other hand, their food supply was lessening every day, not so much on account of the quantity they consumed, as on account of what they had to throw away, and their chances of replenishing it were nil.

He pondered the matter long and carefully, but his mind was still hanging in the balance when the catamaran was pronounced finished.

With herculean labors, and with much straining and creaking both of timbers and temper, and the riving

and giving way of some of their handiwork, they got the curious craft into the water, and as Angaray stood and looked at it, he wondered how it would fare in a gale.

As it rode at last off the beach, it presented this appearance: The boats floated about six feet apart, and a big platform, twelve feet wide and fifteen feet long, covered the whole of both boats, except about three feet forward and four feet aft. The platform was solid enough, and in the center, in front, was stepped a mast, carrying a lug sail. The boats, though broad enough in beam, were considerably submerged by the weight of the platform, and they would ride deeper still when the cargo was aboard.

But, though the boats were strong and the platform solid, the weakness of the structure lay in the juncture of the three. It seemed to Angaray so rigid that in case of very bad weather something must inevitably give, and if one of the boats worked free, then disaster must follow.

The gunwales of the boats had been raised, and each of them decked over and calked, and made as water-tight as possible. The crew were intended to bunk down below in the boats, either under the part covered by the platform or under the covered-in decks.

"Say, captain," said Angaray, struck suddenly by a somewhat startling idea, "are you sure that faith-hope-and-charity craft of yours will go through the passage to the sea? She seems to me about twice as broad as the channel."

Barracott stared at him for a moment with jaw ajee and a stricken look in his eyes. Then he seized a length of line.

"Great jumping Jupiter!" he said, and sped away round the spit till he came opposite the opening in the reef. Angaray saw him attach a piece of coral to the line and throw it across the passage, then haul it carefully in and measure it with his hand. Then he came slowly back. He laid the line out on the sand and got a two-foot rule and carefully measured it again.

"Passage is eleven and a half feet," he said; "at our line of flotation we measure just eleven. We'll just do it, but it's touch and go. My sakes! but you scared the life out of me."

He stopped suddenly, biting his under lip, and then, dashing his right fist into his left palm with a sounding crack, he said slowly:

"Thunder and beans! When she is loaded—she'll take at least another foot. Smite me for a dunder-headed fool! We'll have to load her outside, and if it comes on to blow before we get clear, she'll get smashed to pieces."

"Doesn't sound very tempting for a two-thousand-mile trip."

"She'll be all right with plenty of sea room, but—yes, it 'll be mighty awkward and risky."

"Best plan would be to take her round the island to the other landing place, and load her there. It would be easier carrying things over the ridge than along yon spit."

"That's so," said Barracott musingly. "I believe we'll have to do it that way."

When Ericsson was made acquainted with the difficulty, he would not believe in the captain's measurements, and must go and take them himself. He made the passage only eleven feet, and the result was that

nothing would satisfy them but they must, there and then, settle the matter by paddling the unwieldy craft down the lagoon and through the channel. They just scraped through, with a grinding scar here and there from the sharp-toothed coral, but it was evident that with her cargo aboard she could never pass, and, after considerable discussion, Angaray's plan was agreed to.

They would carry the cargo over in advance to the other landing place, pile it on the shore, and so reduce the actual waiting there to the smallest time possible.

CHAPTER XXII.

5-2=3.

THAT night Barracott, after much turning over of his mind, finally called Angaray into consultation.

"I can't make up my mind as to the gold," he said. "Shall we take it or leave it? It's a risk either way. If we take it and come to grief, it's gone. If we leave it, and anyone comes before we can get back, it's gone too. What's to be done?"

"I should say the risk is less in leaving it. We can hide it away again, and anyhow, no one is very likely to come. Our late callers are not likely to return."

"No," said Barracott, with a grim smile. "I don't think they'll come back in a hurry."

"Then take enough to charter a ship out again, and *caché* the rest."

"I reckon that's the safest plan. There's another

thing I'd like to name to you. Ericsson ought to have a share. What do you say to us each giving him two thousand pounds out of our shares?"

"Certainly, I agree. He deserves it. Will that satisfy him?"

"My! Yes! It 'll make his eyes hang out and set him up for life. I guess he'd let the other hand go at the same figure."

"That's decided then."

"One other thing. Suppose anything should happen to one of us two,—I'm bound to say we're going a risky voyage,—who takes the pile? The one that's left?"

Angaray pondered the matter.

"If you have any relations, and I should be the one left, I will see your share reaches them. If I should go, which is the more likely if we get into trouble, I would like my share to go to little Ranald, if he gets through all right. If you are sole survivor, you take all. How will that do?"

"Right. My folks live in New Haven, Conn."

"We'll put it in writing, and you can keep one copy, and I will keep the other."

He proceeded to draw up the agreement, and asked Mrs. Brodie to witness it, and gave her a copy also on Ranald's behalf; and when Mrs. Brodie understood what they were at, it set her thinking too.

"This is a gloomy kind of preparation for a voyage," she said hesitatingly, as if some unspoken thought were at the back of her mind. "Now will you oblige me by drawing out another document for me?"

And quietly and thoughtfully she proceeded to make

her own will, leaving ten thousand pounds each to Barracott and Ericsson, half the remainder of her fortune to Ranald, and, failing him, to relations in England, and the other half to Angaray—failing Angaray, then all to the folks in England.

“I would very much sooner you did not,” he said, when she came to his name, “I have no shadow of a claim of any kind on you.”

“Have you not?” she said, with heightened color.

“Well, nothing deserving such recognition as this.”

“You must permit me to be the judge of that,” she said, and on no account would she alter her decision. So finally Angaray acceded to her wishes and made three copies of the will, Barracott witnessing it, and the formidable deeds were sewn up tightly in oilskins and each retained one copy.

“God grant they may never be needed,” said Mrs. Brodie fervently, “but——” She shook her head doubtfully at thoughts of the catamaran.

Next morning they selected four different hiding places for the gold, and duly buried in each chosen spot nineteen bags containing each five hundred sovereigns; the other four they reserved to take with them on the catamaran: one thousand of this being for charter purposes, and one thousand being part of Ericsson’s share, which he preferred taking with him. As Barracott had said, he was more than satisfied with the provision made for him, and he scoffed sturdily at the idea of danger on the catamaran.

“We’ll go through it like a bird,” he said. “A catamaran’s the safest craft afloat, and anyhow we can’t stop here, so there’s no use talking about it.”

But there was a brazen assurance in the manner of

his statements which somehow increased Angaray's dislike to the composite craft. Theoretically he knew a catamaran was safe, but somehow this particular catamaran did not commend itself unreservedly to his judgment.

They toiled hard, transporting all the necessaries for the voyage over the ridge. Tins of meat which might contain life or death,—and they had no means of telling which,—tins of biscuit, kegs of water, grew into a big pile around the landing place, till it seemed to Angaray that they had at least four times as much as the catamaran could possibly hold. Then they brought the craft gingerly through the passage and round the coast, and moored her off the out-jutting rock. They laid a plank from rock to boat, and Barracott and Ericsson worked at the stowage while Angaray supplied them with the stuff, along the plank.

Mrs. Brodie came over the ridge to inspect progress, and the looks of the catamaran pleased her less and less.

Angaray came up in a pause of the work, the perspiration streaming down his face, his shirt open at the throat, his arms bare, and his trousers turned up above the knee, and sat down on a hummock of sand near her.

“Mr. Angaray,” said she, “I don't like the looks of that thing.”

“She doesn't look over tempting, does she?”

“She looks perfectly horrible. Tell me, what would happen if a storm came on and one of those boats broke away from the platform?”

“Well, I should say it would be very uncomfortable all round.”

She looked at the catamaran, balefully, and in silence. At length she said decisively:

"I shall not go. We are at all events safe here, and that machine I am sure is *not* safe, and even if it were, the nine days I had in the boat before were too terrible—oh! beyond words."

He was silent for a time, and then said simply:

"If you decide to stop, you will let me stop with you?"

"Surely that is not necessary. We can wait here, Ranald and I, till you bring help. No one is likely to trouble us."

"If you stop I stop."

"I think you had better go with the others"—but she knew perfectly well that he would not go, and in her heart she did not desire it.

"Unless you say positively that if I stop you will not stop, I shall stay here."

"I could not say that."

"Then I stop with you."

She said nothing, but gazed at the catamaran with heightened color.

He went on with the work of loading, and she sat and watched.

At length they had stowed all they could find room for, even with the most ingenious dovetailing, though not nearly all they carried over the ridge.

"Ericsson will sleep on board," said Barracott, "and we will sail first thing in the morning. Best bring over all you want to take with you to-night, so as to lose no time in the morning."

"Mrs. Brodie has decided not to go, captain, and I have decided to stop and take care of her."

Baracott stood stock-still and stared blankly at them, first at one, then at the other.

"Earnest?"

"Yes."

"Does Mrs. Brodie know about the meat?"

"No!"

"Then she ought to. Do you know, ma'am, that some of those tins contain rotten meat? How many we don't know, and cannot find out. For all we know, all we are taking are rotten, and we may be taking all the good ones and leaving all the bad; we cannot tell. It's an awful chance either way you take it, but there it is."

"Then our chances here are at all events as good as yours, captain, and there is no risk of the island going to pieces."

"That's so, but it's a bad place to starve on."

"I would sooner starve on dry land than at sea. We will stop, captain."

Nothing either the captain or the mate or the two together could say, could make her alter her decision. So, early the next morning, Barracott and Ericsson solemnly embarked, after a touching and almost silent farewell. They left with Angaray one of the Winchesters and two revolvers, and with brazenly exuberant assurances from Ericsson of their speedy return, they cast off from the rock and hauled up their lug, and brought their double prow round to the northwest. The others climbed the ridge and sat there watching them draw slowly away, and waved them farewells and God-speeds, as they grew smaller and smaller, till at last they could no longer distinguish the men from their craft. They sat until

she became a dot—until she disappeared from their view.

Then with hearts so full that a word would have set them running over,—hers, in that he had so urgently insisted on remaining when he found that she intended to remain; his, in that she had elected to remain, when she knew full well that if she remained he would certainly remain also,—they went slowly down the ridge and homeward across the sands, with Ranald gamboling about them like an infant Bacchus.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SEEDS OF HOPE.

LIFE on the island, after the departure of the catamaran, soon dropped into a very easy-going groove. There was nothing needed to be done, and Angaray missed the regular work to which he had become accustomed, and which had braced him up bodily and mentally, and had made a new man of him.

He and Ranald bathed, and raced, and romped on the sands, and Mrs. Brodie, having constructed a neat and tasty bathing costume, ventured blushing to join their revels in the water. She was a fair swimmer, and the lagoon knew merrier times than ever before in the whole course of its existence.

But bathing did not fill the day. They tried fishing, but it was desperately slow work. Whether the fish had permanently deserted the island, or had only gone for a temporary change of scene, they could not tell.

Angaray attempted to teach Ranald his letters, drawing them in the sand, and endeavoring to impress them on his youthful and very volatile mind, but Ranald had no leaning toward literature. "A," he mastered readily enough, though his instructor was always in doubt when he said it whether he was pronouncing the letter or only asking what it was, for each of the following letters was always to him "A" or "eh!" and when his teacher vehemently cried, "No, you monkey, that's B, B, B," Ranald would make a dash at the troublesome hieroglyphic, and obliterate it with his twinkling toes, and run squealing with delight up the beach, chased by his tutor; so the curriculum was fragmentary, and the lessons generally ended in a revel.

But they made a discovery about this time that had for them most important issues.

One day, for lack of anything else to do, Angaray took to overhauling the seamen's chests, which had been brought from the wreck, and stood round the sides of the storehouse like so many old-fashioned tombstones.

He found a strange and miscellaneous collection of articles,—a perfect museum,—and it provided them with occupation for many a day; Mrs. Brodie trying to fit the articles to the various members of the crew, as she remembered them, and Angaray trying, by a process of deduction, to settle which belonged to the ruffian who plied his fellows with the Winchester from the ridge, and which to that other who wrought the still more dastardly crime with his revolver. There was plenty of room for speculation. But the find of all, which surpassed in value everything else, whether

curious or valuable, was in itself so simple that it might well have been passed over as a worthless trifle, and yet, as matters turned out, their lives hung upon it. On such apparently trivial things, at times, depend the issues of life and death.

In a corner of one of the chests Angaray came across a paper bag, into which he poked his finger, and a number of dry wrinkled beans fell out, as hard and twisted, almost, as cowrie shells. He tossed them on to the floor, and Ranald took to playing with them. His mother found him sifting them with his hands and throwing them about, and said:

“Why, what have you got there, laddie?”

“Pikky,” said Ranald, “Dad—da giveded Yanal.”

“Let me see them,” and she examined them curiously, then looked at Angaray, who was bending over the chest and rooting among its contents. A strange light glowed in her eyes.

“Mr. Angaray, do you know what these are?”

“No—dried beans, is it?”

“These are melon-seeds, and these are beans, as you say, and these of course are maize.”

“Yes?” he said, not following the drift of her idea.

“Is not this island volcanic?”

“I believe so. Barracott used to say so.”

“I think we could make a loam that would make these seeds germinate. They might be useful.”

“Useful?” he said, springing up. “Why, they may be our salvation. We will try at once. Can you advise on the matter? I know as much about gardening as I do about shipbuilding.”

They set to work at once, and compounded a number of varied mixtures of sand, and powdered shells,

and lava, and coral. He burned seaweed and added it, and they laid out a number of patches of their various composts, and carefully planted seeds in each, keeping a rough record as to the style of the mixture.

So a new interest was added to their lives, and never was bed tended more assiduously, or more carefully watered and watched. After a time, when no signs of life appeared, Angaray indeed began to fear that, like a watched pot, their seeds were suffering from too much attention.

Then there came a time of storm and stress. The rainy season burst on them. The wind roared and howled round and over the sand houses, and Angaray rejoiced in the necessity of laboring for their security. He piled up huge sandbanks on the roofs—the sides being practically part and parcel of the ridge were solid enough, it was only the roofs he feared—and thanks to his precautions, and to his constant supervision and labor, they weathered the gale.

The sea was a sight never forgotten by any of them; even Ranald gazed at it with awe, with eyes like saucers, and open mouth of wonder.

The mighty rollers, sweeping on their mad four-thousand-mile race, roared at the unexpected obstacle of the reef, and swept over it in thunderous bursts of foam, which rocketed up to heaven, and then came thrashing down into the lagoon, till it was churned to creamy yeast. The flying foam-sponges whirled and scudded over the island like driving snow, and Ranald chased them with glee; and, when he cornered one, was lost in amazement at its sticky impalpability. The usually placid waters of the lagoon were driven high up the beach, and halfway to the ridge. The air was

thick and heavy with the flying salt, and the island absolutely shook with the fierce onslaught of the sea. The remains of the wreck came ashore the first day, and when the islanders thought of the catamaran and their friends aboard of her, their hearts sank, and they thanked God that their own feet stood on solid earth.

“God help them!” said Mrs. Brodie. “They are in his hands. I am more than ever thankful we stayed behind. It is not possible they can live through this.”

On and off, the bad weather lasted nearly a month. Then it swept past, and they had blue skies and brilliant sun once more, with a crisp, bracing air, and the feel in all things as of a fresh start in life.

Angaray found that the meat tins ran about half good and half bad. He had ceased emptying the rotten meat into the lagoon, but carried it to the far end of the island and flung it out there; and one day, going his usual despondent errand, he found a number of gigantic crabs crawling about the rocks, and evidently awaiting with impatience their daily dole of rotteness. They were hideously big and ugly, and reminded him unpleasantly of his old enemy the devil-fish.

He smashed one with a rock, and the others immediately held an inquest on the remains, and pronounced them good, and wanted more. He succeeded in raking out the two gigantic front nippers from among the other gnashing mandibles, the owners of which glared at him angrily and reproachfully from their hideous protuberant goggle eyes.

He took the big claws home, and they found them

good eating, in spite of the carrion feeding of their former owner; and after that, big-crab claw formed a regular item in their menu.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BLOOMING OF THE GREAT WHITE FLOWER.

So the days ran into weeks, and the weeks grew into months, and the months strung themselves slowly into an ever-lengthening chain, and still no news reached them of the captain and the mate. After that terrible month of storm, indeed, they almost gave up hope of ever hearing of them again: for it seemed to them impossible that the catamaran should have lived through it.

Still hope dies hard, and down at the root of their lives there lingered the unspoken clinging to possibilities, which, if Barracott and Ericsson had come sailing up to the island in a well-appointed ship, would have led them to exclaim simply, "Ah, here they come at last!"

And now, as though to counterbalance their disappointment at the non-arrival of help, a gracious ray of hope was vouchsafed them in another direction. That is life all over—as one door closes another door opens. When all the doors close upon a man, then his case is hopeless, and his best friend is the Reaper.

The rascally meat tins had been panning out worse than usual lately, and Angaray's face grew grave with anxiety at sight of their rapidly decreasing food-supply.

Like the Flagellants of old, he thought to reduce the trouble of his mind by the mortification of his body, and he paced round and round the island till he knew every shell on the beach and every hole in the coral. And to him, tramping thus, with anxious care gnawing like a rat at his heart, came Mrs. Brodie, and his face brightened to her as it always did.

"Stop one moment, you obstreperous person," she said. "What is wrong now? I can always tell when your barometer is low, as Mr. Ericsson used to say. Your stride gets just half as long again as usual."

He smiled.

"Are the meat tins behaving worse than usual? Did you find two bad ones this morning instead of one?" she asked with a smile.

"I found four, all one after the other!"

"Yes, that is very bad;" yet she did not seem depressed. "Come with me, my friend." And looking into her face he found it brighter even than he was in the habit of finding it.

She led him to the garden patches which he had given up as a bad job, and had ceased to expect anything from.

And there, in three or four of the plots, there gleamed through the various molds tiny points and sheaths of heavenly green, the first growing green things they had seen for over a year.

She pointed to them silently, and watched him, and was not surprised when, overcome with a feeling of gratitude too deep for words, he unconsciously took off his hat.

"That is just how I felt," she said, and their hearts were linked a little closer together

Once above ground, and tended now with the utmost solicitude, the tiny shoots soon developed into healthy plants, and began to divulge their mysteries.

"Melons," said Mrs. Brodie, as the leaves unfolded; and then, sure enough, great bell-shaped flowers appeared, and she went down on her knees before them, and kissed them.

"Ah, now I shall be so much happier," she said; "I have sorely missed my flowers. Think of not seeing or smelling a flower for a whole year!"

The maize and the beans followed in due course, and as rapidly as possible a new crop of fresh-grown seeds was put in, and amazed their planters with the rapidity of their growth and their prolificness.

This coming of the flowers and the fruit, with the welcome message of hope they brought—for it seemed beyond a doubt that this desert might be made to blossom like the rose—relieved their hearts of a grave anxiety and developed in her a rare warmth of friendliness and fellowship, which made Angaray's heart leap and set all the pulses of his life a-tingling.

Perhaps some other feeling was at work in her. Who knows? Who shall attempt to understand the inner workings of a woman's heart?

She laid aside her wifhood and her widowhood—almost her motherhood. All the springs of her nature quickened, and she became a girl again,—a big sister-mother to her sturdy boy,—and to this man all heaven and earth.

She walked with them, bathed with them, danced and raced with Ranald on the beach and in the shallows like a schoolgirl, and grew younger, fairer, gladder for every day she lived. She read to them,

and sang to them, and talked to Angaray till he came to know bit by bit almost the whole of her life.

This wild, bright *camaraderie* charmed and thrilled and intoxicated him, and made it hard for him to keep himself in hand, and not open all his heart to her, and yet made it all the harder for him to ask her to share his broken life.

He was sorely exercised in his mind. Should he cast himself down at her twinkling feet, and put his life's happiness to the touch? There was ever before him the horrible fear that in so doing he might wreck beyond repair both present and future. And so, the brighter and happier she grew, the graver became his face and the more strained his mood.

She could not fail to notice it, and perhaps she understood. In her, at all events, knowing both her own heart and his, there was neither doubt nor fear, and one day she said to him:

"What is troubling you, my friend? Are the meat tins behaving badly again?"

And thereby she brought down upon her devoted head the impending avalanche.

He looked deep and long into her sparkling eyes, and knew that she knew.

A sudden wild impulse slipped the brake of his strong restraint. One moment's more of half clinging to his resolve—then a full deep breath, and it went overboard.

"Will you join me?" he said, with quite unintentional indication of his meaning, "and I will tell you;" and he offered her his arm with a ceremonious movement, half of coercion, half of supplication.

She could not refuse without rudeness—and she had no wish to.

They walked in silence for a time, his mind a whirling chaos of thoughts and words. Choice of expression he had none, though for months he had forecast this moment, and planned his words and phrases and procedure.

It came at last all in a heap—as it should.

“Isobel!” and her hand jumped convulsively in his arm, although she had known what was coming. “You are all heaven and earth to me.” He stopped and faced her, taking both her small hands in his, and feeling the life in her pulse through into his own, while he looked down through her swimming eyes deep into her heart. “I know better than you do all that I ask. Will you be my wife?” And the beautiful eyes, which held all heaven to him, never flinched, but glowed calmly back into his, and she answered fearlessly:

“I will. I trust you absolutely.”

He bent and kissed her on the lips, and then, strong man as he was, to her great surprise he there and then fell on his knees in the sand and kissed the hem of her robe.

“My God! my God!” he said, and overcome with a great emotion he flung himself prone, with his head in his arms, and so lay. She sat down by his side, with the light of a great joy in her eyes, and waited, not understanding. She stroked his hair, gently and soothingly, as a mother comforts her child. He sat up at last, and his face was calm, though still lined with strenuous emotion.

“My whole life shall thank you for this day,” he said. He took her hand in his, and they sat looking

over the sea. "I know most of your life," he said gravely; "there is that in mine which I cannot tell you."

She was silent for a time, but did not withdraw her hand.

"Does it concern—another woman?" she asked after a while, with a slight catch in her voice at the last words.

"No, thank God! You stand alone. I was married, but my wife died. . . That was years ago. . . It concerned another man. This much only I can tell you. I shot him in hot blood, having the thought rather to kill myself, and never a thought to injure him, till it was done. . . And I have passed through the fires. . . My God! what have I not suffered! . . . But not at the hands of man. The law never inflicted punishment such as I have gone through. . . I can tell you no more," he said, drearily, . . . except what you know—that I love you very dearly." All this with many breaks and pauses, his eyes fixed on the sea, and never daring to approach her face.

And for answer her hand nestled the closer into his and gently pressed it.

"The past is past for both of us," she said softly, "we will do our best with the future."

He raised her hand in both his palms, and dropped his forehead on it with a gesture passing description. It bore penitence for the past, gratitude for the present, pledges for the future, and betokened her complete and absolute sovereignty.

Then, hand in hand, they went home like new-pledged lad and lass.

And so their two hearts were linked together, and

to both of them life became fairer and sweeter than ever it had been before.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHOM GOD HATH JOINED.

THE chain of the months grew longer and longer, but not as other chains, which grow in weight with increasing length. For these two the days were never long, and the weeks and months slipped by unheeded, save for the joy and brightness of them, for their lives were glowing again with the vivid colors which love alone weaves.

The days were never long enough, but the nights—for him, at all events—were long and lonesome. Perhaps for her also. Yet did he not dare to hint at a still closer companionship, so he veiled his mind and thanked God for so much. She was Queen and held the keys, and his part it was to wait her pleasure.

And as before, it was she herself who, of her grace, opened the door to him, and gave him the much-desired entrance. One night they were sitting out under the stars, as they often did when Ranald had yielded to pressure and consented to go to bed. Hand in hand they sat, heart communing with heart in the sweetest speech of silence, and the man's heart was big with unspeakable thoughts.

It was she who broke the silence at last.

"Do you think they ever will return?"

"I am beginning to fear it."

"Which? that they will, or that they won't?"

"Either! I am very happy here—almost perfectly happy."

"Almost?"

"Yes—almost;" and his heart began to beat furiously.

"And what—would make you perfectly happy?"

He remained long silent, and she looked at him till he looked up and felt her eyes glowing upon him, pure and calm as the great lights above.

And then in a low deep voice, shaking with the feeling that was in him, he said:

"I think you know."

And she, smiling a grave, sweet smile:

"My dear, I am yours, and we are here, I fear, beyond the hope and reach of man. We are here in the hands of God, and here we may live and die. . . Do with me as God and your own heart bid you. . . I trust you wholly . . . you have my whole heart . . . the rest is yours too."

He fell on his knees before her and caught her to him. She bowed over him, and he smothered her with kisses.

"God do so to me, and more also, if ever you rue this day," he said, in a voice husky with emotion.

"Amen!" she said, and kissed him sweetly on the lips.

So, kneeling under the stars, pulse throbbing to pulse, and heart speaking to heart, he pledged his life to her in the solemnest of vows; and then at last rose and led her by the hand to her house.

"May God ever keep you, heart of my heart," he said, "to-morrow we will wed."

And on the morrow, with Baby Ranald as their witness, and having no expectation of ever being able to consummate their union in more formal fashion,

they joined hands and pronounced themselves man and wife.

She handed him her little red morocco prayer book, and said simply:

“ Let us read the service together.”

They read it through, and surely never was there stranger wedding, and never were the petitions of the holy rite more fervently breathed or more devoutly felt.

“ Oh, Lord, save Thy servant and Thy handmaid,
Who put their trust in Thee.

Oh, Lord, send them help from Thy holy place,
And evermore defend them.

Be unto them a tower of strength
From the face of their enemy.

Oh, Lord, hear our prayer,
And let our prayer come unto Thee.”

Then he took pen and ink, and carefully inscribed on the fly-leaf of the prayer book:

“ In the sight of God and man, I, James Ayrton Angaray, take this woman, Isobel Brodie or Easdaile, to be my lawful wedded wife.

“ JAMES AYRTON ANGARAY.”
“ October 10, 188—.

And she, taking the pen, wrote below it:

“ In the sight of God and man, I, Isobel Brodie, or Easdaile, take this man, James Ayrton Angaray, to be my lawful wedded husband.

“ ISOBEL BRODIE OR EASDAILE.”
“ October 10, 188—.

She had not known what his middle name was, and its synonymity with that of her late husband's partner struck her as a curious coincidence. But their feelings were strung too high to permit of her speaking about it, and she never referred to it. So these two became one, and into their lives there came a golden glory, which has never failed them since. For the trying fires of God had cleansed and salted the heart of the man, and the woman was, by right of birth, an angel of goodness and purity, as all good women are.

CHAPTER XXVI.

3 + 1 = 4.

AND so the time passed on. Another rainy season came and went, and the island, desert no longer, was radiant with green and gold, of melon and maize and the trailing vines of the beans.

And never for one moment had these two regretted the step they had taken. The binding of their lives had brought them only the greater happiness, and their cup brimmed full. And Ranald! no brighter, braver, sturdier boy trod earth or breasted wave than the little islander. And, save for his sake, they would have been well content to spend their lives there, and to pass thence to their rest.

But it was not to be.

They had long since given up all thought or hope of rescue. They expected no callers and kept no look-out.

One day, as Angaray lay on the sand at his wife's

feet reading to her, and she busily sewing, Ranauld came bounding over the ridge with the spring of a young deer and his face blazing with excitement.

"Father! Mother! Come quick—quick!" and he began hauling them toward the ridge.

"What is it, laddie?" said his mother, dropping her work.

"Oh, I don't know! A ship, I s'pose, like father showed me in the pictures."

"A ship!" and they hurried up the ridge.

Yes, in very truth a ship, a big topsail schooner coming up under full sail, and heading straight for the island.

They stood and watched with swelling hearts and very mingled feelings. Isobel Angaray's hand stole into her husband's and clasped it tightly, and he—from the bottom of his heart he prayed God that the end might be as the beginning, and that their lives might suffer no sudden catastrophe. And that brave warm hand in his quieted all his fears, and made him strong.

"Is there any chance of it being those *Bluewing* men back again?" she asked.

"I don't think so, but we may as well be prepared. If you will keep an eye on them, I will get the Winchester and the revolvers. Lie down here on this side of the ridge, and they won't see you." He fervently hoped there would be no fighting; for neither rifle nor revolvers had been touched for months.

As he came up the slope again, he heard the report of a gun, and quickened his steps, pulling out the the joints of the telescope as he ran.

"What's up?" he panted, as he dropped flat by the

side of the others, and raised his head cautiously above the ridge.

"She fired a gun and ran up a flag, but I can't make it out," said his wife.

"That's all right. Doesn't look like mutineers, at all events."

The schooner had rounded to about half a mile from the island, and, as they watched, a boat dropped into the water with a splash, and in two minutes more was bounding toward them.

It was a sharp-nosed boat, pulled by four strong, well-timed oarsmen. In the bows knelt another man with his face set eagerly toward the island. Angaray slid the telescope over the crown of the ridge, and got it to bear on them. Then he flung it down and sprang up, waving his arms.

"It's Barracott," he said, "come back after all."

In five minutes more the boat's nose ground against the coral, and the captain came springing up the slope. He shook them all by the hand a dozen times, and could scarcely speak.

"My goodness!" he said at last, when the first emotion of the meeting had passed. "Mrs. Brodie, ma'am!" (at which she blushed and glanced at her husband)—"Mr. Angaray—Ranald, my son!—what a size of a boy you're getting! It's a happy man I am to find you all alive. I more than half expected to find you all lying in one grave, like the Spaniard and his wife. I guess you had the pick of those d——d meat tins. Ours were most all bad."

"Ours, too," said Angaray, "but we found something else to go on with. Look there!"

They had topped the ridge, and the captain's eye

ran amazedly over the luxuriant growth of greenery which clothed the other slope.

"Wonderful!" he said. "How did you manage it? Sent home for seeds?"

"No, they were here all the time, but we hadn't the sense to find them."

"And Mr. Ericsson, captain?" asked Mrs. Angaray.

He raised his hand and dropped it with an expression of finality that told the story in bulk.

"I was thankful there were none of you with us. We went all to pieces in that gale, and Ericsson went down. I will tell you about it some other time."

"Hello!" he exclaimed, noticing the armory lying on the ground. "You thought to follow my advice, and shoot first and ask questions afterward? Just as well you weren't put to it," as he picked up the Winchester,—“been no shooting since I left, I should say.

"And the gold?" he asked anxiously.

"Never been touched. I don't think we have even thought about it. It's all just as you left it."

They had reached the house, and Mrs. Angaray went inside, while Barracott and her husband strolled on to the other house which had been theirs.

Angaray was wanting to tell the captain of his marriage with Mrs. Brodie, but found it difficult to broach the subject.

"Hello!" exclaimed Barracott again, as they entered the other house, "why, where do you——"

Just then, while the captain's eyes were beginning to search him with curious interest, Ranald trotted up with a message from his mother, and he put it into

Angaray's hand. It was the little red morocco prayer book. Angaray held up his hand to the captain to stop his remarks, and handed him the book, open at the fly-leaf.

Barracott read the two inscriptions slowly, and then handed it back to Angaray and wrung his hand cordially.

"I think you did quite right," he said. "She's the very best woman in the world."

"We thought we had done with the world."

"Aye, aye! But you didn't reckon on Jim Barracott." Then, with a sly whimsicality, he said slowly, "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"—and he laughed a great good-humored laugh. "What a silly fool I was ever to think of it! I must go and congratulate madam."

He strode off to the other house, where Mrs. Angaray blushing received his congratulations.

"You did the very wisest thing in the world, ma'am," he said. "And you've made a good man very happy. I see it in his eyes. If you'll let me I'll marry you properly on board the schooner, and be proud to do it, and then nobody can ever say a word."

And she thanked him so very sweetly that he vowed to himself that it was no foolishness to have loved her, for who could possibly help it, knowing her as he had done.

"Now, Mr. Angaray," he said, as they all came together again, "if you'd let my men take some of those melons and some green corn aboard they'd take it mighty kind of you. We're forty days out. Thirty-five days past the last of our green stuff. I'll send a message to Will Derrick, the mate, to keep off and on

all night, and I'll stop here and sleep in the old house, and we can have a chat over the fire as we used to. Ranald, my son, you're a credit to the island. Have I been away three years? I feel like Old Rip when he came back home and found everything changed. Run, sonny, and bring three of the men here. Say 'melons,' and they'll come like bears to a honey-pot."

And, as the captain had said, they were on top of the ridge wiping their watering mouths with the backs of their hands in the half of no time.

They gathered round the fire that night as in the old times, and Barracott told them, in terse, graphic sentences, the story of the forlorn hope.

"Ericsson was on deck when the hurricane hit us. It was my watch below, and I was fast asleep in my section, which was the *Bluewing's* boat. I heard a mighty smash. But by the time I got my head out it was over. My boat had broke loose, and the rest, with Ericsson in it, was gone. Four months' hard work—and some pretty hard feeling," with another whimsical look at Angaray,—“it took to build, and the sea sent it into slats inside five minutes. And a thankful man I was, ma'am,” he said, looking at Mrs. Angaray, “that your good sense had kept you safe ashore. That was the last I heard of the mate, and I had no time to think of anything but keeping above water. I managed to keep her before the wind, but she was both heavy and top-heavy, and I expected every minute she would go over. I was afraid to lighten her, lest she should capsize. But she took in water so badly that I had to do something, and so I baled her out and then tore down all I could of her top hamper, leaving only the raised bit at the stern, as

that kept the waves from breaking in. Then I flung overboard quite half of the meat tins, and I wished to God I could tell which were the good ones and which the bad. For I might be throwing away all the good meat and keeping all the bad, for all I could tell. But they had to go, and when they were gone she rode easier. And there was I, in a boat without mast or oars, and a cargo consisting of twenty tins of meat,—half of 'em rotten, no doubt; some tins of biscuit, a keg of water, and two bags of five hundred sovereigns each. For seven days I was baling night and day, with a nibble of biscuit or a bit of meat between times, and so dog-tired that more than once I fell asleep baling, and was wakened by the water washing up over me, and then I started baling again. A terrible time! I don't know how I lived. After seven days the gale blew out, and I rigged up a sail made out of my shirt and some bits of planking, and ran straight on, day after day, for thirty whole days. The water gave out on the twenty-fifth day, and the meat!—some of it was horrible, but I couldn't afford to throw it away. I washed it in sea water to take the smell away, and did the best I could not to taste the stink of it. I guess it was that made me ill. Of the last five days I remember next to nothing, and then I found myself on board a Britisher bound from San Francisco to Cape Town. They were very good to me, but I had to go with 'em and no getting out of it. They'd shipped my gold on board, and I gave 'em one-third for salvage. But that bad time in the boat, and that filthy meat, had taken all the life out of me; and when they reached the Cape they put me ashore in hospital, and there I lay for nigh three months, and then got up

as weak as a kitten, and my brain in a tangle. It was eight months, almost to a day, before I landed in New York, and it has taken me all the time since, till now, to convince old Jakins that I wasn't crazy, and to get him to advance enough to charter this schooner, and to get here, and right glad I am to find you all in such fine fettle. And to-morrow, Mr. Angaray, I'm going to marry you and Mrs. Angaray over again on board the schooner there, which I have a right to do. So then you'll not be able to back out of your bargain, even if you wanted to."

Angaray took his wife's hand in his own and raised it reverently to his lips, and said quietly:

"God has done great things for me, more than I had any right to expect."

Next day, Captain Barracott, with twinkling eye and abundant ceremony, formally united James Angaray and Isobel his wife in the holy bond of matrimony, Will Derrick, the mate, officiating as best man and giver away of the bride, and the crew of the *Island Belle* acting as coy and blushing bridesmaids. Angaray, exercising the bridegroom's privilege, bestowed on each man a present of ten pounds, and treble that to the energetic groomsman, who vowed he had never enjoyed a wedding so much in his life.

Then they had a wedding feast, and drank up all the champagne which had been rescued from the wreck, and all went merry as a marriage bell.

Barracott declared that he had always wanted to try his hand at marrying, but had never had the chance before, and that the performance of the ceremony made him feel so good that he would like to try

it again, with a view to a permanent improvement in his moral nature.

"If any of you," he said, glancing round among the blushing bridesmaids, "want tying up when you get home, bring 'em along to me, and I'll do it for you free, and as tight as any parson in the land."

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW THEY CAME TO THE ISLE OF SILENCE.

THREE days later, having dug up the gold and divided it among Mrs. Angaray's boxes and two of the seamen's chests, lest the knowledge of it should demoralize the crew of the *Island Belle*, as it had done that of the *Bluewing*, they bade farewell to the lonely islet where the happiest days of their lives had been spent.

They found it a naked desert, they left it rustling proudly under its still scanty new green robes; but a year or two would find it clothed like a queen from head to foot—from ridge to beach.

Their hearts were sad at leaving. The past was theirs and could never be taken from them. The present too was theirs. But the future was pregnant with possibilities, and might hold anything for them. Whatever it held, it could hold nothing better than the past had done.

So they hung silently over the stern, and watched the island grow smaller and smaller, till it was gone. Then hand in hand, and heart heartening heart, they turned their faces to the future.

"You're in no great hurry to get home, I s'pose?"

said Barracott, when Mrs. Angaray had gone below. "My charter runs for four months, and I've an idea——"

"No hurry at all. In fact, we're sorry to go, except for the boy's sake. We couldn't have him grow up a savage, you know."

"No fear of that anyhow, seeing where he sprung from. Say, Mr. Angaray, I'm dead in love with your wife yet, and you'll just have to put up with it. I never came across a woman so just exactly what a woman should be. My sakes! I wish——"

"And what's your idea, captain?"

"I've an idea I'd like a cruise among the islands. It's all on the way home anyhow, and it's just possible we might strike something there."

"What kind of something?"

Barracott looked at him hard, and said: "*Blue-wing.*"

"Ah! by all means. I would like to see the rest of those rascals strung up before they do any more harm in the world."

"Then it's a go," said the captain, "and if we strike 'em, we'll strike 'em hard."

"Don't run my wife and the boy into any danger, that's all I ask."

"Nary!" said the skipper, "that kind hasn't much spunk in it when it comes to a straight stand-up fight. Creeping in in the dark to cut people's throats is about all they're good for."

"Are you armed for a fight?" asked Angaray.

"You bet! I came for three things this time"; and he ticked them off on his fingers with a castanet snap between each item. "First: Mrs. Brodie and the boy

and you. Second: The gold. Third: To wipe out those devils that stole my ship and tried to cut our throats. One and two are O. K. I would like to make a clean board."

"And the men? Will they fight your battles?"

"Let's ask 'em."

He told the mate to call the men aft, and as they stood round him in a half circle he told them briefly the story of the *Bluewing* treachery. "Now, my lads," he said, in conclusion, "if that kind of work strikes you as right, I've nothing more to say. If it makes your blood boil as it does mine, then you'll help me wipe 'em out—if we can find 'em. What do you say?"

A deep growl of approval rumbled round the circle, and conveyed the information that "if the captain would find 'em, they'd soon knock the stuffing out of 'em, or they'd jolly well know the reason why."

"And if we get the *Bluewing* back I'll tack on a couple of hundred dollars to every man's wages," said the captain.

"And I'll do the same," said Angaray.

And the crew swore blood-curdling oaths, and began to tuck up their sleeves for a fight.

So they made a bee-line for the Austral Islands, which were the nearest to their own, but found nothing for their pains. Thence they sailed to Rarotonga, and on again to the Society Isles; but nowhere could they hit the trail. And so from group to group and from isle to isle, searching and asking everywhere, and not a sign of the malefactors.

At Makatea, at last, they came on their traces; but the scent was old and led to nothing. A year before

—the natives told them—a schooner put in there and picked up the castaway crew of another schooner, wrecked on the island some months before. She sailed away and came back two months later, short of more than half her crew, and after staying a while she went away again, carrying off some of their women without paying for them. But that was—oh, months and months ago; and she had never come back. Did the captain want any girls, or fruit, or pigs, or copra?

The captain wanted fruit and did not mind some pigs, at a price; but as to girls—he wounded their feelings sorely by the evil names he called them. So they brought him fruit and fresh meat in fear and trembling, and called him “Missionary-devil,” because of his foul-mouthed purity of morals.

Their search seemed futile, and they began to weary of it, and Barracott’s charter was running all the while.

“We want our old sleuth-hound, Ericsson,” said Barracott. “He’d have nosed them out before this by the tingling of his stump.”

But they could not have Ericsson, so they wandered on from isle to isle, and were about to relinquish the quest when, one afternoon, they sighted a dim blue sugar-loaf peak on the far horizon.

“Is it any good trying there, captain?” asked Will Derrick, “uninhabited, I guess. Charted simply as a rock.”

“Why, certainly! we’ll try it,” said Barracott, with some asperity, for the fruitless search was trying to his temper. “When you’re searching, search everywhere. It’s often the most unlikely place pans out best.”

So they turned the ship's prow to the peak, and raised it, bit by bit, till it loomed before them high and glorious.

"Pretty good size of a rock," said Barracott; "the man that charted that simply as a rock ought to have it dumped on his head."

They circled it slowly, feasting their eyes on its luxuriant growths and gracious greenery; and presently they came on a natural harbor, almost landlocked, as though the side of the mountain had slipped down, scooping out the harbor and piling up the breakwater at one and the same time.

And over the ragged line of the breakwater soared the two tall slim masts of a ship.

"The *Bluewing*, for a dollar," said Barracott, snapping with excitement. "Now we have 'em! Now we have 'em right and tight!"

They drew across the mouth of the harbor, but saw no signs of life or lookout.

"The lazy hounds! they deserve to swing for keeping so poor a lookout," said the captain; "and swing they shall, by thunder, unless they're men enough to get shot."

The island seemed wrapped in a heavy afternoon sleep.

They could see native huts above the beach of the harbor, but there came no sound or sign of life from them. Palms waved and rustled—great dark-fronded plants nodded sleepily to the breeze—bright-winged birds flew shrieking in and out—a drove of little pigs came squealing out of a thicket and began rooting and squabbling on the beach, then in a panic rushed helter-skelter away, tumbling over themselves in their haste,

and screaming as though a knife was in each little black throat.

The sun dipped as the last black piglet disappeared. The birds stopped their shrieking, and not a sound was to be heard but the lip-lap of the water on the streaks of the ship, and the murmur of the men hanging over the side with wide eyes bent on the shore.

The *Island Belle* crept slowly on. It looked as though their approach had not been noticed. It looked indeed as though there was no one there to notice it.

"Seems to me they're all away merrymaking somewhere," said the captain. "We'll send in the boats after dark. If we can bring her out without a fight, all the better. I don't want my men to suffer more than need be."

They quietly dropped an anchor with a stout cable attached, and to their surprise found bottom at a depth of twenty fathoms.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AND WHAT THEY FOUND THERE.

IN utter silence, with muffled oars, the two boats dropped away into the dark, and pulled for the mouth of the harbor; Barracott in charge of the one, Derrick of the other. Angaray, with two of the crew, remained in charge of the ship. Barracott had insisted on it most emphatically.

"You have more than yourself to think of now, Mr. Angaray, and your proper place is here in charge of her. Maybe the cunning devils are watching us

all the time, and will row out and try for the ship as soon as they know we're away. They'll know we must leave her short-handed, and it's the kind of game that would suit them to a T. If you hear any sign of their coming fire two shots sharp together, then count six and fire two more, and we'll be back as quick as oars can bring us."

Those on board waited with straining ears for the sudden outburst of the sounds of battle, or for any slightest ripple that might betoken the secret coming of the foe.

But strain as they might, till their eardrums nearly cracked, not a sound reached them.

The boat found the harbor mouth and crept silently in, Barracott leading the way. They turned inside the breakwater and crept along toward the schooner,—slowly and silently,—not a splash from the oars, not a breath from the men.

They bumped against her side and silently gripped with the boat-hook, till the other boat came up and passed along the side and gripped on also.

"Now, are you ready?" whispered Barracott. "Then in you go! quietly! quietly, lads!"

They swarmed over the side, and overran the deck on tip-toe, securing the fo'c's'le hatch, and the door leading into the deck-house. But only dead silence met them, and in dead silence they waited. At last, under cover of the bulwarks, the captain lighted a small lantern he had brought with him. Then opening the deck-house door, inch by inch, and flashing in the light over the muzzle of his revolver, at last the door stood wide. Still no sound, and he stepped inside. The house was empty, so was his cabin, so was

Angaray's. With like precaution they entered the fo'c's'le, and found it also empty. The hold was still to search, but they decided to wait for daylight before attempting it. The galley was cold, and seemed as though it had not been used for weeks.

It was a long, uncanny watch, and every moment Barracott feared to hear Angaray's signals.

Daylight at last. They lifted the cover of the hatch, and half a dozen of them dropped down into the hold—empty, like all the rest of the ship.

“Now, lads, bustle around and we'll have her alongside the *Island Belle* in the half of no time.”

They cut her mooring ropes, carried a tow-line to the bigger of the two boats, and fifteen minutes after daylight were towing her slowly toward the harbor mouth, and out to where the *Island Belle* awaited her, with the characteristic silence of this strange island. But here was life, at all events, for ten bright eyes shining over the side welcomed their coming and the relief from the anxieties of the night.

They moored the recovered *Bluewing* alongside the other schooner, and waited quietly for developments.

The sun climbed, and stood, and went down on the other side, taking what little wind there was with it, and never a sign came from the island.

“They're waiting for night,” said Barracott, “a hundred of them might be watching us from those thickets; and we can't get away till the wind comes. We'll be all ready for them anyhow.”

All through the day the eyes of all on board were focused on the shore, and the captain's glass swept every inch of it within range. The bright birds flashed and shrieked, they heard the distant squealing

of the little pigs, but never a sight or sound of humanity.

The night passed undisturbed, in densest silence, and as soon as daylight came Barracott announced his intention of going ashore, come what might.

He took half a dozen of the men, all armed with revolver and cutlass, and they slipped quietly up the harbor and grounded on the shell beach below the huts.

They approached them cautiously, full of awed curiosity, sure now in their own minds that if they met with no resistance they would find dead bodies and the evidences of some ghastly catastrophe.

But the first hut was empty, and the second, and the third, and so all down the line. Not a single body, alive or dead; and yet the implements and utensils of everyday life lay about everywhere, just as they had been dropped after last using, and in several of the huts the great gray heaps of wood ashes on the flat stones were still warm at their cores when the men kicked them.

In more than one of the huts they came across evidences of the white men—a silver-mounted briar pipe—a corkscrew—a sheath-knife and belt, and a revolver—a pair of large sea-boots—and a tarpaulin hat—but of their owners not so much as a bone. The only living thing in the whole of the huts was one of the little black pigs curling down among the gray wood ashes in the last hut—the one nearest the forest—as though emulous of becoming roast pork before his time. When they entered he lurched up, a very Phoenix among pigs, in a cloud of ash dust, and fled for the forest, squealing as though possessed.

They made a cursory preliminary examination of the fringe of the thickets, but found nothing; and finally returned on board, full of wonder and wild speculation as to the reading of this exceeding great riddle.

"Did you ever hear anything to beat it?" asked Barracott of Angaray, as they leaned over the side of the ship with their eyes glued to the island.

"What can possibly be the meaning of it?"

"It beats me flat," said the captain. "Failing live men, I made sure of finding bodies—might have been murder and sudden death—might have been plague, pestilence, and famine—but it aint nothing—just simply nothing—all gone out pop, so far as I can see. I don't believe there's a living soul on that island, Mr. Angaray, though what's come of them that should be there, God only knows. To-morrow we'll rake the whole place over from truck to keelson, and if there's anything to find, we'll find it."

On the morrow they landed in force, and began a close and systematic search of the island, moving in groups, and keeping well together, while they silently beat the dense tangles of the lower thickets; scanning every crack in the rocks for signs of secret hiding places; peering into holes; delving into suspicious mounds, keenly alive to the possibilities underlying lately disturbed soil, and found—nothing. And so, emboldened at their want of success, they harried the higher slopes, till the trees thinned off, and they compassed the dome of the sugar-loaf, and had the whole island mapped out at their feet, and still had made no discoveries.

The sun shone brightly, the sky glowed blue and

deep, the sea shimmered and glinted, the palms and greenery waved and rustled, and over all—this dreadful silence—a silence of death. Ah, that it was that made them hang together and creep cautiously from thicket to thicket, expecting every moment to come upon some awful sight that would be the reading of the riddle. But when they had topped the summit, and could look down like eagles over the whole of their little world below, with the two toy schooners swinging lazily to their moorings, out beyond the harbor, they were satisfied at last that not even a single cast-off outer husk of humanity remained to pollute the island. Then they gave the riddle up, let themselves loose, and their shouts and cries went shrilling along the mountain sides, and woke the dead echoes of the woods, and sent birds and piglets crazy with fear.

Barracott, at Angaray's request, sent off a boat to bring his wife and Ranald ashore, and mightily they enjoyed the feel of solid earth once more, and reveled among the laden fruit trees, and expressed the wish never to trouble the sea again.

And Ranald's delighted amazement at the little pigs and the bright, shrieking birds kept them all in high good humor, for he had never seen their like, and he spent most of his time in ineffectual attempts at a closer acquaintance, which, from the point of view of pigs and birds, was extremely undesirable.

Posting a lookout on the mountain, as near the summit as a beat could be established, with telescope and gun, and stringent instructions to keep a bright lookout, and fire a shot if anything hove in sight, the captain decided that the whole ship's company might

spend the night ashore, and pass the whole of the next day there, and the following day they would sail, after levying tribute on the fruit trees and on the patches of melons and corn and green stuffs.

So the men scattered skylarking over the island, till it rang with their shouts and laughter, and Mrs. Angaray and Ranald spent themselves in the endeavor to corner one little pig, so that the small boy might be formally introduced to it; and Barracott and Angaray trod the beach deep in conversation.

"This is an improvement on our old half-sunk rock, Mr. Angaray," said the captain.

"In some respects, yes! But that half-sunk rock has very special claims on my consideration, you know."

"Aye, aye! that's so, I know. All the same you'd have had a better time here."

"Perhaps we would. See here, captain, I've been thinking things over, and it seems to me there's not much sense in my wife and the boy and myself going to San Francisco. I must get to China as soon as possible, to look after her interests. You must, I suppose, take the *Island Belle* back to her owners. But I'm going to propose that you let me take the *Blue-wing*, and man her as well as you can. I suppose we might supplement both crews with some natives, and perhaps you could spare Derrick to take charge of her. One other thing,—and my wife feels as I do in the matter,—we want you to take the whole of the treasure. It is yours by right, and if ever man deserved it you do. We have more than we know what to do with. Our tastes are very simple. If we see our way to it, we would like to renew our island life in some

place not quite so inaccessible as the last. It has been one of the desires of my life to live just so, quiet and retired, and my wife's wishes run with mine. Now, what do you say?"

"It's like you, Mr. Angaray, and—her, and it's too good an offer to refuse, though I've really done nothing to deserve such—such——"

"You brought me to my wife."

Barracott cocked his eye at him knowingly, and murmured again, "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?" And Angaray laughed at recollection of his little piece of diplomacy.

The day they spent on the island was much enjoyed by all of them, but the night was not so great a success. In fact, it was a dismal failure. For as the shadows crept out of the sea and filled the thickets with mysterious possibilities, and climbed the mountain side, and chased the last lingering rays off the top of the sugar-loaf, a feeling of chill discomfort fell upon them. The men crouched round their big wood fire, and their spasmodic jokes and laughter gradually died away, till they found themselves listening in silence to the hissing and spitting of the logs, and the fitful moan and rustle of the night wind among the palms and giant ferns, and every sense straining after other sounds which their superstitious fears half led them to expect. It was an uncanny and unrestful night, and the captain decided that the next should be spent on board.

Daylight dispersed their fears, and they had a right merry time harvesting the fruit and melons which had gladdened other hearts in the ripening, and had been for other hands to pick. As night fell they pulled

merrily home to the *Island Belle*, and the captain gave orders that preparations for the start should commence with daylight.

Derrick and four men were to take charge of the *Bluewing*, the two schooners would keep company as far as the first island where they could procure some additional hands, and then Angaray would transship all his belongings to the *Bluewing* and head for China, while Barracott carried the *Island Belle* and his fortune back to San Francisco.

He was strongly tempted to accompany the others, and send the *Island Belle* back in charge of Derrick, but when it came to the point, he found he could not give up the realization of his heart's wish to make the eyes of the "boys," who had called him crank and scoffed at him for years, hang out to the ground with envy at his good luck.

But it is the easiest thing in the world to make plans; their carrying out is quite another matter.

It was many a day before they left the island, and the manner of their stopping was in keeping with the many strange things that had happened to them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW THE "HOLY GHOST" CAME TO THEM.

BARRACOTT and Angaray were sitting in the main cabin, talking over their parting plans and making new ones for the future, when there came the tread of rapid feet outside, and one of the watch stuck in his head all a-bristle with excitement, and his face the color of blue chalk.

"For love o' God, captain, come out here quick!" he cried, in a hoarse whisper.

The two men sprang up and followed him.

It was a very dark night, still and close, and no moon or stars; so heavy was the atmosphere, indeed, that the ship seemed cooped within a wall of ebony, and nothing could be distinguished twenty yards away.

The crew, both watches, were gathered in a clump in the waist, like a frightened flock of sheep, and as Barracott came up they gathered round him. He noticed that every man carried his revolver and cutlass.

"Well, what's wrong now?" he asked, peering round at their faces.

"Hist! Listen!" said someone, in a whisper.

And, as dead silence fell upon them, there came from the direction of the mountain a faint tremulous sound like music.

It rose and fell,—now full-bodied, though faint and distant,—now the merest thread of sound,—but music without a doubt, if any of them had ever heard music. The fuller tones sounded like voices in discordant chorus, the thinner like the linking accompaniment of some instrument. And the weird sounds rose and fell, and seemed to be drawing nearer.

If there had been a moon, stars even—if they could even have caught the loom of the mountain—well, things would have seemed different. But they could see absolutely nothing—only hear, and the hearing was uncanny, and set every superstitious fear that was in them a-jumping.

One thought was in every mind—the lost inhabi-

tants of the "Silent Isle," or the lost souls of them, were about, and had broken their mysterious silence, and were drawing nearer to them every moment.

Their amazed and terrified ears strained themselves to the point of cracking. They looked at one another with eyes starting with fear and wonder.

The awesome sounds grew louder, drew nearer, and the men huddled tighter together, and closer round the captain.

"Oh, Christ!" groaned one, in a very agony of terror.

"Good Lord!" whispered another.

"'Eaven and earth!" from a third.

"Oh, my Gawd, what is it?" moaned a fourth.

But for the most part they were stricken with panic fear. They sweated and shivered in silence, and their breath came short and fast.

"My God!" said Barracott, unnerved himself by the terrors of the rest, "what *can* it be?"

Nearer and louder came the music. They could plainly distinguish the harsh voices of men, and the music in between, and it sounded like the reckless howling of the madhouse or the damned, and yet had something of unearthly music in it.

Nearer and louder—louder and nearer—till, round the northern bend of the island, a phosphorescent-haloed body came gliding along the water, and the pandemonic music burst full upon them and seemed coming straight for them.

Barracott recovered his wits first, and whispered rapidly to Derrick and Angaray, and they sped to his bidding.

A long white vessel—a screw steamer—with many

lights on her deck, which cast a halo all round and flecked out her white funnel and masts—came curving gracefully round, and made as though to enter the harbor.

As she drew nearer, the amazed eyes on the schooner could make out by the lights of her that her decks were full of men, fantastically dressed in priestly garments—black soutanes, and gorgeous red and white gold-embroidered vestments. They were capering and dancing and singing ribald songs at tops of their voices, and a harmonium, played by a hand as skillful as it was irreverent, ground out an accompaniment which, in most marvelous fashion, softened the discords and wrought all the varied harshnesses into a blend that was not unlike music—say a Wagner chorus in first rehearsal.

Suddenly a shrill high-pitched voice on board of her rang out:

"You can't do it in the dark, you fools. Stop her! She'll be aground and done for."

And Barracott started when he heard the voice, and bent over to Angaray and whispered: "Know that voice?—that's Virtue of the *Bluewing*."

"All right, old man!" sang out another voice in the steamer, "keep your hair on, we're a-stopping of her!"

She slowed up, and presently the anchor plunged, and the chain ran out with a shrill rattle, and she swung round, not three cables' length from the schooners. And aboard the schooner they thanked God for the veiling of the moon. Barracott whispered to the men:

"Into the cabin, quick! We've work to do to-night—and not a sound for your lives."

They went like cats, and foregathered in the saloon. It was dark as pitch. Derrick and Angaray had seen to it that no lights were showing.

"Now, lads," said Barracott, hoarse with excitement, "this is a life and death job. That crew over there is the lot we've been searching for, and it's their lives or ours. If we don't put them away to-night they'll put us away as soon as they catch sight of us in the morning. Are you game?"

For answer he heard them spit on their hands and loosen their cutlasses and revolvers, and some of them growled, "Aye, aye!" and some of swore big oaths under their breaths, but one and all were keen to work off on the crew of the steamer full payment for the sickening fright they had just come through.

"Right!" said the captain, buckling on his own belt and cutlass, and sticking his revolvers into it. "Now, off with your shoes. I'm going on deck. You'll wait here. When I give the word slip up and into the boats, and go like cats. And remember—no quarter! They won't spare us, and it's God help us if we fail."

He passed quietly out, and the rest waited in the dark close cabin a full eternity.

Barracott hung over the side, and watched the doings on board the steamer. The singing and revelry had stopped with the dropping of the anchor. The revelers were probably mostly drunk, and, tired out, had flung themselves down on deck to sleep.

It was not likely they would keep a lookout, being in their own home waters, but he would give them another clear hour to settle down. So he hung over the side and waited. Within the hour all was quiet

aboard the steamer, but he waited the full time, and then crept down to the cabin.

"They're all down at last," he said, "and it's as black as a hat. Tear up that tablecloth, and each of you tie a strip round his left arm for fear of mistakes. Now, come on, and—quiet!"

They glided up like a row of shadows—along the deck, and over the side into the boats, which had not been hoisted in. Barracott put out a firm hand on Angaray as he passed, and said:

"No, not you—I won't have it. I'm captain. You will stop here. Not a word, please!" and Angaray had no choice but to stop.

A dozen long quiet strokes, and they were alongside. Then up and over, and hell broke loose.

Barracott landed with both feet on the stomach of a man lying flat on the deck. The sleeper doubled up with a last gasping oath of astonishment, and the captain passed his cutlass through him. They slashed and stabbed at every recumbent body they found, and the deck was soon covered with stumbling-blocks and slippery with blood. Then a shot came whistling promiscuously among them from the doorway of the cabin under the poop, and a gasp told that it had struck home. They dashed in a body for the door, and carried it in, meeting half a dozen more shots as they tumbled into the cabin. And as the captain fired his revolver to profit by the flash, it showed them a man standing in a corner behind a table. He hurled his empty weapon in their faces. Half a dozen shots rang out, and he fell. He was the last man—and the capture was complete.

They routed out lanterns and lit them, and by their

fitful light surveyed their handiwork and took stock of their own wounds.

Will Derrick had a shot through the side—the first shot fired—but the bullet had come out at the back—painful but not serious. Three of the other men had provided billets for the bullets of the man behind the table, the arm of one was shattered, the other two were hit in the shoulder. That was the full list of casualties. Of the pirates, not one seemed left alive. It had been blind work. They had chopped and cut at random, but the ghastly work had to be done, and they had done it very thoroughly. Barracott shouted the news of their victory across to Angaray. Then they found food, and ate and drank and waited for daylight. It showed them a grewsome sight when it came. Fourteen bodies lay about the deck, and they were all hacked and gashed in terrible fashion. They dropped them overboard one by one, but when they hauled out the body from behind the table in the cabin it opened its eyes and swore at them, and when the wounded man saw Barracott he fairly foamed at the mouth.

“Hoped you’d rotted to pieces on that rock, Jim Barracott,” he said, when he found tongue again.

“Jim Barracott’s not the man to rot anywhere, while hounds like you go unhung, my man,” said the captain.

They did their best for him, and tended him as carefully as they did their own wounded. But he cursed them high and low for everything they did for him, and for everything they left undone. His wicked mouth could scarcely open without a torrent of blasphemies curdling out.

He was a case-hardened wretch, this Virtue. Case-hardened!—rather three-ply triple-water-gas-welded steel, and there did not seem to be a single good point in him. He had three bullets in him, however, and yet clung to his miserable life with a tenacity worthy of a better cause.

"I'm sorry he wasn't killed right out," said Barracott. "I reckon it would have been pleasanter all round. However, maybe he won't last long."

He lasted long enough, however, to beat his own black record in attempted treachery, and, in the failing, to accomplish their salvation.

Their prize was a thing of beauty—a twin-screw steamer of about one hundred and fifty tons, with the lines and fittings of a yacht, and a yacht as a matter of fact she had been, and a royal yacht too, but had since been put to nobler uses. She was all white, inside and out, though now indeed her decks were no longer white, and the grim red stains and splotches reached up the bulwarks and climbed up the foot of the masts. A gilded scroll at stern and bows proclaimed her name *Spiritus Sanctus* (The Holy Ghost), and her name, and the gilt crosses that tipped her tapering masts, and the great black crucifix in front of her white funnel, and the numberless other crucifixes nailed onto, and carved into, the woodwork of her cabins, the priestly vestments, and the harmonium, all proclaimed her character. She was a missionary boat, belonging evidently to some Roman Catholic mission on one of the islands. How that ribald crew got possession of her, they had still to learn.

A beautiful boat, but she was destined to bring them into sore peril of liberty and life, and their escape was a narrow one.

Barracott decided to form a camp on shore for the sake of the wounded, but on hearing of it they one and all protested so loudly against it that he gave the idea up, and instead towed both schooners and steamer inside the harbor, and moored them all three in the place where the *Bluewing* lay when they found her. The *Island Belle*, being hospital ship, lay nearest the shore, and the steamer was the outermost of the three.

The captain and Angaray and Mrs. Angaray and Ranald, however, elected to live ashore, and accordingly they took possession of the two cleanest huts. The wounded man Virtue was also carried ashore, because he was such a nuisance on board, and they lodged him in the furthest away hut, the one nearest the forest, where the little black piglet had tried to convert himself into pork.

He protested against being taken ashore as loudly as the rest. But they had had enough of his venomous tongue and evil humors, and they paid no heed to his objections. But when the two men who unwillingly carried him to the hut dropped him on the rough wooden bed there, and left him, his torrent of blasphemy dried up, and he lay shivering in spite of the midday heat.

Angaray took charge of him, and endeavored to smooth his descent as much as possible; for it was no business for a woman to engage in, and the very appearance of Barracott at the door of the hut was sufficient to make him foam at the mouth and choke with curses. Each night when the shadows came creeping in at the door, hiding in the corners and flitting about with the flicker of the wood fire, he sank into so low a state of despondent silence that Angaray hoped he

had slipped quietly away. But the morning brought life back to him, and he cursed them all as volubly as ever. He seemed as if he never would fulfill their hopes and die. All unknown to them and himself, he had a work to do before he went.

Angaray always looked in on him before turning in himself, and he usually found him wide awake, but sunk in so profound a state of apathetic dejection that he only looked at him, put fresh water near him, and left him to himself and—his shadows.

One night, however, he found him unwontedly excited and restless.

"Stop with me," said the sick man; "if you don't, I will crawl after you. I will not be left to-night. They came again last night, all the lot of them—and Konea too. They sat on my bed and gibbered at me, and the kids were all over the floor. There! hear them screaming! They're coming! and they'll keep on coming till I'm ready to go with them. I'm not ready! I won't go! They'll join hands round me and dance me down to hell!"

"It's only the wind," said Angaray. "If you'll be quiet, I'll stop with you and smoke a pipe. If you keep on like that, I'm going."

"No—stop, stop! Shut the door, then that girl can't get in. Hear her crying outside?"

"Why does she want to get in?" said Angaray.

"She lived here. This was our hut. But she had to go with the rest. We wanted peace, so we made a clearance."

"Tell me all about it. Here, take a drink."

"I don't mind telling you, if you'll stop and keep them from coming in. There aint noth'n to it, any-

way. We came here in the *Bluewing* four months ago. We'd been skirmishing round among the islands and having a good time, and we wanted a rest. We were getting worn out, so we came here to Tau-mauru to lie by for a bit, and we were quite happy. Then one of them blooming Dutchmen we'd picked up must go and get himself mixed up with the wife of one of the islanders here; and that made rows. There were ten native men and about twenty women, and a lot of kids, besides the girls we'd brought with us. And then it was row, row, row, from morning to night, and we'd come to be quiet. So as they wouldn't on no account be quiet, we just swep' 'em all away, so's to be ready for the next deal. We didn't want no bloodshed, we'd had enough, so we just drove 'em up the mountain with our revolvers to where the ledge sticks out, and we made 'em jump off into the water, and if they hung back we shoved 'em over. It was as easy a way as they could have. They was dead, most of 'em, before they struck the water, I reckon, and it left no bodies, nor blood, nor mess. When we'd done, there wasn't a copper-skin left on the island. We was tired of 'em all anyhow, and if we hadn't killed them they'd maybe have killed us—treacherous devils they was, and the girls the worst of the lot, when they took it into their heads, and you never knew when that would be."

He paused for a drink. Angaray had listened to this recital with horror, and with a growing desire to set his heel in the dying man's face. The riddle of the Silent Island was read indeed, and his soul sickened with disgust. He would hear the rest, however.

"And the steamer?" he asked, biting hard into the

stem of his pipe. It felt like complicity even to be listening to the matter.

“Aye, aye! the steamer, the *Spirituos Sanctus!* Ah! that was good! We got took on board as castaways, having been planted on a rock she had to pass, by the *Bluewing*, for that purpose. And they did us well, too, I’m bound to say, and in the night we just up and cut their throats—’cos why, we wanted their ship. That was all there was to that. It was all as easy as winkin’. Then we went a missionary cruise among the islands, and you better believe we had a rare old time,” and he chuckled like a lost soul—“we made ’em sit up and open their eyes, you bet, and some of ’em won’t forget the *Spirituos Sanctus* in a hurry. No, sir! Then we came back here for a quiet time again. We’d run over to Taletea for drink, and we was only away four days, but you ’uns came in the meantime and we went under.”

“I’m going,” said Angaray, and went out.

“Close the door, close the door, and keep ’em all out!” screamed the sick man; and his cry and his story rang in Angaray’s brain as he strode away to his own hut.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN A VERY TIGHT PLACE.

JUST one week after the fight, the wounded being all in fair way for recovery, and even the wretched Virtue still clinging to life in a fashion that was little short of marvelous, Mrs. Angaray and Ranald had rambled off

into the wood after flowers, and Barracott and Angaray were lying in the shadow of one of the huts, again discussing plans for departure.

It was a gorgeous golden afternoon—sea and sky and land all gleaming with vivid colors, and so still was the air that the two lying in the shelter of the hut could hear the voices of the convalescents on board the schooner on the other side of the harbor. And to this most peaceful assemblage there came suddenly a great surprise.

Down the harbor, straight for the beach, where Barracott and Angaray lay, there came with short, quick, clock-work service strokes a beautiful white boat, manned by sailors all in white, with an officer in the stern in blue and gold, and in the bows a brass swivel gun, which flashed lightnings as the sun played upon it. So unexpected and so perfectly beautiful was the sudden apparition, that the two men lay and watched it in the middle of a broken sentence. The white boat, and the gleaming gun, and the white-clad sailors, the blue and gold officer, and the long, white, rhythmical oars scarcely marring the serene blue of the sea—the whole looked just like a crisp, delicious little bit of biscuit china, suddenly endowed with life and motion.

A sharp word from the officer, and the oars rested level with the boat, glancing in the sun, and pointing the water with serried rows of diamond drops. She looked like a beautiful bird of prey, poising for the swoop.

“*Messieurs,*” cried the officer, “I must ask you to surrender.”

Barracott uncoiled his length from the shadow of

the hut, and came down to the beach, with Angaray in his wake.

"Beg pardon?" said he.

"Do you surrender?" said the officer again sharply,

"I'm afraid I don't catch on," said Barracott.

"*Comment?*—Catch on? I do not understand."

"Well, I guess we're in the same boat."

"*Bien!*" Then, a sharp order to his men, and instantly every oar fell with a splash into the water and hung by its safety-line. The white sailors stooped, and in a moment stood facing the two men on the beach, and covering them with the rifles they had snatched from under the seats, while the gunner in the bows held his lanyard taut, ready for the tug.

"Now you understand?" cried the officer.

"Hanged if I do," said Barracott. "What's wrong?"

For reply the officer jerked his thumb in the direction of the *Holy Ghost*, and snapped:

"*Voilà!*"

"I think you are making a mistake, *monsieur*," said Angaray.

"*Monsieur!*" said he in blue and gold sharply, again jerking his thumb in the direction of the steamer. "*Voilà.*"

As Barracott and Angaray stood, puzzled and anxious, before this warlike demonstration, something else suddenly caught their eye. A trim white gunboat had glided round the point and lay across the harbor mouth, her guns trained on the beach and the huts.

"This is serious," said Angaray. "What the deuce does it all mean?"

"They take us for the men who stole the steamer and murdered the crew. The gunboat has been sent to capture them, I suppose;" and Barracott whistled long and low.

Mrs. Angaray and Ranald appeared at the edge of the lower thicket, Ranald jumping and waving his hands with delight at the beautiful boat and its showy crew. They came down to join the others, and the officer politely doffed his cap, his crew still holding them all at the muzzles of their guns.

"This is the devil," said Barracott. "Come to think of it, how are we going to prove that we didn't steal that steamer?"

"It may not be easy."

"Can you speak French?"

"Slightly."

"Then talk him fair and explain matters. Our papers are all in order, if we can only make them believe all we tell them."

"*Monsieur*," said Angaray, in limping French, "there is a mistake."

The officer shrugged his shoulders and glanced at the steamer, as though to say this was childish work, and the matter was beyond argument.

"Our countries are not at war, I believe. I and my wife"—the officer raised his cap again and took it as an introduction—"are British. Captain Barracott and his men are Americans."

"*Merci, monsieur*, but pirates have no country."

"We are no pirates. Our schooners lie out there, and we recaptured the steamer from the men who had stolen her just a week ago."

The officer shrugged again, and flickered his hands

up and down, as though to say such fairy tales had no interest for him.

"*Tenez!*" he said, and spoke a word to the men, who dropped their rifles to attention.

Then two or three quick words to the man nearest him in the boat, who laid his rifle under the seat and brought out a couple of small flags, with which he began signaling the gunboat.

Within five minutes another boat, the exact counterpart of the first, came shooting down the harbor, as though the bird of prey had called to his mate, and she had come. The officer of the first boat gave some instructions to his colleague in the second boat, then ordered his men to the oars again, ran the boat's nose on to the beach, and signed to those on shore to embark with him.

They had no choice but to obey, and when they were seated the boat swept away down the harbor to the gunboat, while the other boat remained on guard.

When they climbed the steps of the iron gangway they found themselves inclosed within three sides of a hollow square of white-clad sailors, armed with rifles, on which they leaned as they regarded their visitors. Under the poop astern stood the captain, in a heavily-gilded cap, and several officers.

Their blue and gold capturer went before them and saluted, and detailed his information in a quick voice, and with many gestures.

The captain looked at the group and pondered the matter. Then he asked them to come forward and say what they had to say on their own behalf.

"Were you concerned in the seizure of the *Spiritus Sanctus?*" he asked sharply.

"No, sir. We recaptured her seven days ago from the men who were in possession of her."

"And where are they?"

"They were all killed in the fight, except one who is lying at the point of death in one of the huts on the beach," replied Angaray.

"And which of those two schooners is yours?"

"Both, *monsieur le capitaine*. We came here in the *Island Belle*, the one lying nearest the shore, and found here our own schooner, which had been seized by our crew eighteen months before."

"A very strange story, *monsieur*."

"And yet true, *monsieur le capitaine*. Stay, would you oblige me by having my friends here removed; then, if you examine us each separately, and all our stories agree, the presumption will be that they are true."

"Still," said the captain, "you might easily have concocted them beforehand."

"We might, of course; we certainly have had no opportunity since your officer surprised us."

"Well, we will see," said the captain. "We will form a proper court of inquiry, and I shall have the benefit of my officers' views."

He gave his orders, and Barracott was led away in custody in one direction, and Mrs. Angaray and Ranald in another.

In ten minutes the court was ready, and Angaray was ushered into the captain's cabin, where the table had been cleared, and all the officers sat round it, with the captain at the head as president. They evidently quite enjoyed the formality of the proceedings.

"Now, *monsieur*," said the captain, "your story."

Angaray began in halting French to tell their story, but he floundered into such a muddle that the captain, with a smile, said, in perfect English:

"Perhaps you will get on better in English. If you will speak slowly and distinctly we can, I think, all follow you. If there is anything you do not understand," he said, looking round the table to his officers, "ask me, and I will translate."

"Now, *monsieur*, your name?"

"James Angaray."

"Nationality?"

"British."

"Now your story, and remember, speak slowly and clearly."

"Nearly two years ago I chartered the schooner *Bluewing*, Captain Barracott—that is my friend out there—at San Francisco, for a six months' cruise among the Islands. We were driven out of our course, and eventually came to an island on which was the wreck of a schooner, the *Isobel*. We found there a gentleman and his wife and boy, Mr. and Mrs. Brodie, of Shanghai, China. Their men had mutinied, turned them adrift in a boat, and eventually they reached the same island on which the *Isobel* had in the meantime herself been wrecked. As we lay off the island, Captain Barracott, myself, and the mate went on shore, and our crew ran away with the schooner and left us there to die. They came back some months later, but we beat them off. We constructed a catamaran, and Captain Barracott and the mate sailed on her to bring help. Mr. Brodie died one week after we landed on the island, and we were there, in all, eighteen months. We gave up all expectation

of ever leaving the island, and Mrs. Brodie consented to marry me. Then, to our surprise, Captain Barracott returned to our rescue on the *Island Belle*, having reached San Francisco after many trials. We sailed on the schooner, and sought for the *Bluewing* among the Islands. We touched at Rarotonga, and the Society Isles, and Makatea, and eventually reached this island, and found the *Bluewing* here, and not a living soul on the island. Before we could sail with the two schooners, the *Spiritus Sanctus* came in one night with a crew of drunken scoundrels on board. They anchored close to us in the dark without seeing us, and we could distinguish by their voices that some of our old crew of the *Bluewing* were among them. We waited till they were asleep, and then boarded her and killed every man of them except one, who, as I said, lies at the point of death. We were resting here for our wounded to recover when you arrived. That is our story, *monsieur le capitaine*."

"And a very strange story it is, sir."

"That I acknowledge, but still it is true. If you let my wife and Captain Barracott tell their stories you will find they agree with mine in every particular. Ask my wife if she has any proofs of her husband's death and our marriage, and she will show you a red morocco prayer book, which never leaves her, and which contains the record. These are all the proofs I can think of at the moment."

The captain rang a bell, and gave Angaray into the charge of a quarter-master. Then they had in Barracott, and finally Mrs. Angaray and Ranald.

Their stories were, of course, all the same, and Mrs. Angaray, by her sweetness of demeanor, and her cour-

ageous and vehement disclaimer of any connection with the piratical crew, made a distinctly favorable impression on the court. Ranald was full of delight and excitement at the novelty of the situation, and could with difficulty be restrained from wandering about the room, and inspecting and touching the furniture and pictures and the officers themselves. Mrs. Angaray, when asked by the captain if she had any proofs of her husband's death and her own subsequent marriage, instantly produced the red morocco prayer book and handed it to him, in the many folds of silk in which for safety she always carried it about with her.

He examined it very carefully, and returned it to her with a bow. Then the prisoners, still kept separate, were removed, and the court gave itself up to deliberation, after which they were again all four brought in.

"Monsieur Angaray," said the captain, "the stories you have all three told are, as you said, in all particulars the same. So far good. But really, as a man of the world, your common sense will tell you that in all this there is no absolute proof. We do not wish to do you an injustice, but you must perfectly well see that it is conceivable that this unique story was concocted among you long since, for just such an emergency as this. Can you assist us further? You see," he went on, "it is known that the schooner, from which the wretches landed who seized the mission boat and cut the throats of her crew, is that identical schooner the *Bluewing*, which you claim as your own. Your story may be perfectly true; on the other hand, it may not. My instructions are explicit to bring back to Vavita the *Spiritus Sanctus* and the men who seized her, or"

—he added, with grim conciseness—“to account for them.”

Angaray pondered deeply, and then said:

“I can only suggest further, *monsieur le capitaine*, that you interrogate separately each one of our men on the *Island Belle*, which came direct from San Francisco to rescue us from the island. You will find that they will in all points confirm our story, so far as they know it.”

He stood still thinking, while the captain and the court eyed him gravely.

“Stay,” he said suddenly, “I have an idea which might work out. In the furthest hut from the beach, the one nearest the forest, there lies the only survivor of the men who seized the *Spiritus Sanctus*. He could, if he would, tell you the whole story, but from what I have seen of him, and I have been nursing him for the last week, I know he will not do so. On the contrary, he is one of Captain Barracott’s old crew of the *Bluewing*, and for some reason he hates Captain Barracott like poison. May I suggest, *monsieur le capitaine*, that you go ashore with your officers and interrogate him. If I know the man aright he will jump at the hope of involving us all, and especially Captain Barracott, in ruin. He will swear to you that we are the men who seized the steamer, that Barracott was their leader, and that we were all his companions in the enterprise. He will swear all that, and then you will ask him to identify one by one the rest of our crew, who, if his story were true, must have been his companions, and whose names he ought to know. You can easily satisfy yourselves from the papers of the *Island Belle*, and by interrogating the rest of the

crew as to each man's identity, whether that man—Virtue is his name—is telling you the truth, or not. It is, I acknowledge, a negative kind of proof, but if you see the matter from my point of view, I think you will take it as final. Interrogate first our own crew of the *Island Belle*, then at once see this man Virtue. There can have been no collusion between us and the crew, since we have been in your custody from the first moment you came."

Captain Barras talked the matter over with his officers, in voluble French which the others could not follow, and finally turned to Angaray and said:

"It is truly about as curious a form of proof as ever I came across, but we follow your reasoning, and we will try it as you suggest. Meanwhile I must ask you to still consider yourselves prisoners on board here, until the matter is properly cleared up. We will set about it at once. Meanwhile, my steward shall attend to your wants."

The steward speedily laid before them such a collation as induced Mrs. Angaray to regret that they could not be taken all the way to San Francisco as prisoners on board the gunboat. Barracott's mind, however, was running on thoughts of his treasure, which this unforeseen turn of events placed in gravest jeopardy.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SALVATION BY TREACHERY.

THE captain and his officers pulled away in state, in the three remaining boats of the gunboat, to the *Island Belle*, and there continued their inquiry on the lines suggested by Angaray.

They obtained the ship's papers, and with an instinct for detective work worthy of Gaboriau or Vidocq, they hit upon a method of identification which debarred any possibility of collusion among the men. The captain and his officers ensconced themselves in the cabin of the schooner, with the ship's papers and the names of the crew before them. They had in first Will Derrick, the mate, still pale and weak from his wound, and every other man on board was placed in the custody of one of the French sailors, with stringent instructions to permit of no communications whatever between them.

Derrick was then examined, and told his story, confirming those they had already heard. The first American sailor was called in. Derrick was requested by Captain Barras to write the name of the man at the head of a large sheet of paper and hand it to him, which he did. The man was then asked his name, which tallied with that given by Derrick, and against his name on the sheet was placed the figure "one"; then, to the sailor's vast amusement, the figure "one" was traced in ink on the back of his brawny hand. He gave vent to long guffaws while this operation was in process, and inquired from the captain if he was to be

put up for sale. Then he was requested to tell the story of the *Island Belle* up to date, which he did. He was then led out, still in custody, and the next man was introduced. The first question put to him was as to the name of the man who had just left the room, which was found to tally with the name given by the man himself, and by Will Derrick. Derrick was then requested to write the name of number two on the big sheet of paper, under the other name, which he did. The man was asked his name, which tallied again, and he was duly labeled on the hand number "two," and requested to tell his story, and so on all through the crew. The men treated it all as a huge joke, not understanding in what peril of liberty, if not of life, they lay, and when they were ordered into the boats for the shore, and ranged round the hut in which Virtue lay dying, their mirth gave place to amazement. The numbers with which they had been labeled had constrained them to attempts at jocularities on board, which, however, were sternly repressed, and now they sat on the sand with their guards, in a state of profound expectancy.

Captain Barras and his officers entered the hut, and stood round the bed where the sick man lay.

"My man," said the captain, and Virtue's eyes started half out of his head, when he saw the sudden irruption of uniforms into the semi-gloom of the hut, "I am come to carry to justice and punishment those who seized the *Spiritus Sanctus* and murdered her crew. Can you give me any information?"

Virtue lay looking at him with staring eyes, and his evil spirit leaped at once, as Angaray had foreseen, to the chance of bringing destruction upon Barracott and

his men, who had ousted him and his comrades from their ill-gotten prize.

"Ha, ha!" he said, "so you have come, and caught us all on the hip? Well, I knew it would come sooner or later, and for me you have come too late. I am going where you won't want to follow me, but," in a tone of despondency, "I'm sorry for the others. Captain Barracott is a bold man, and I hoped never to see him swinging at the yardarm."

"Then you confess the matter?" said Captain Barras sternly.

"I don't see as you leave me much choice. We was all in it, and we hoped we'd got clear. It's the old story, as I was always telling Captain Barracott. There's no escape unless you get far enough away, but he would stop here, though it was always against my views. I'm sorry for him, but he ought to have gone further, as I told him."

From the snakish manner of the man Captain Barras knew that he lied, but for his own justification he must carry the matter to the end.

"And this is all true?" he said.

"True!" said Virtue. "The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God, and as I'm a dying man."

"So!" said the captain. "Perhaps you will help us to identify by name the other prisoners."

"Surely," said the man, his eyes gleaming with satisfaction at the success of his plan. "Help you all I can, captain, seeing you're too late to trouble me."

"Very well," said Captain Barras; "bring in the prisoners one by one, and let this man name them as they pass."

Barracott and Angaray had been brought from the gunboat, and Barracott was brought in first, guarded by two marines.

"Oh, captain," whined Virtue, "sorry am I to see us come to this. But didn't I tell you to get further away, and you wouldn't. See what you've brought us all to."

Barracott ground his teeth and glared at him, and was led outside.

Angaray next, and Derrick, of course, he identified. Then the boatswain, John Small, "number one," was led in.

"Hello, Green," said Virtue, "now you see what Captain Barracott's brought us all to. Didn't I tell him, time and time again, to get further away, and he wouldn't!"

"You dirty rat," said the boatswain, and spat at him and passed out.

The captain glanced at the number on the back of the man's hand and at the paper containing the names, which he held.

"What did you say is that man's name?" he asked.

"Green—Peter Green."

"Thank you," said the captain.

Number two was then brought in, William Mayne by name.

"Hello, Griggs!" cried Virtue. "That is John Griggs," he said to the captain.

"Thank you," said the captain, penciling the name against number two.

And so on, all down the list, not one name right. When the last man had passed through the hut the captain turned down to the dying man, and looked

down at him with an expression of such contemptuous disgust that Virtue shivered uncomfortably.

"My man," said Captain Barras at last, "your treachery has failed. You have done just the opposite of what you hoped you were doing. Die quickly and go down to your punishment. Your master, the devil, is hungry for you."

He went out, followed by his officers.

"Gentlemen!" he said to Angaray and Barracott, and touched his cap with graceful courtesy, conveying his apologies and regrets for all previous misconceptions, and by the simple action completely rehabilitating them in the eyes of his men, who fell back from their prisoners of their own accord, "I am satisfied of the truth of your story. You are free."

And the wretched Virtue in his hut, where the shadows were beginning to creep out from their lurking places, flung up his left hand toward the roof, and threw himself back on his bed with a muttered curse.

When they came to him in the morning he was dead, and his face was twisted and seared with agonies which none had witnessed but God and the shadows he feared so much.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GOOD-BY!

CAPTAIN BARRAS and his officers did their utmost, by present helpfulness, to atone for past mistakes, which, however, Angaray and Barracott freely acknowledged to have been inevitable under the circumstances,

The hospitality of the gunboat was offered to Angaray and his wife and Ranald as far as Tahiti, where hands could be procured to complete the manning of the schooners. They accepted it with pleasure, and enjoyed their three days on board exceedingly: for all the officers vied with one another in making their stay agreeable.

Ranald's bright, inquisitive eyes and irrepressible little body were all over the ship, and after the first day, he decided that when he grew up he was going to be captain of a gunboat.

The flotilla sailed next day, the *Spiritus Sanctus* manned by men from the *Espérance*, which also supplemented the crews of the *Bluewing* and the *Island Belle*. They bent their course for Tahiti, leaving Taumaruru to the silence which seemed to be its portion, and to its one lonely grave: for, little as he deserved any consideration at their hands, they buried Virtue in Mother Earth, and left him in undisturbed possession of the silence he had created, and in the quiet which he had craved, which death alone could bring to him.

Three days they lay at Tahiti, and on the fourth they spread their wings and dipped their flags to their friends on the gunboat, and swept away round the point.

For seven days they sailed together with favorable winds and endurable seas, and on the eighth, being then in the neighborhood of Christmas Island, the ships were hove to, and Barracott came on board the *Bluewing* to bid them all farewell.

"I wish I was going with you," he said; "but I'll never be happy till I see old Jakins's eyes hanging out at sight of all that gold. Good-by, little man!

Good-by, Mr. Angaray! Good-by, ma'am. May God be very good to you! And you, Will Derrick, if you don't carry them safe across, there'll be the devil to pay, and me to collect the payment. So keep your eyes skinned and your head clear"; and so, over the side and back to his own ship.

His boat was hardly up to the falls when both ships slanted their sails to the breeze and parted company—the *Bluewing* heading toward the setting, and the *Island Belle* toward the rising of the sun.

Then there was waving of caps and hands, and many a deep "God-speed!" as the ships drew rapidly apart, and the waste of waters between them grew wider and wider.

Angaray leaned over the side of the *Bluewing* by the side of his wife till the last flicker of the *Island Belle's* topsails disappeared; then they looked into one another's eyes, and, hand in hand, turned their faces to the west.

And the heart of the man, with its fuller knowledge and its more sorrowful experiences, was humbled to the dust yet lifted up to heaven, at remembrance of the strange and wonderful ways in which he had been led; and the soul of him swelled with thoughts beyond the telling.

THE END.

